

Mindfulness with Breathing (Ānāpānasati), Part 2 of 8

ĀNĀPĀNASATI : TETRAD I (Steps 1 & 2)

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

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A Dhamma lecture given at Suan Mokkh on 2 October 1986

In the late 80s and early 90s, until his health deteriorated too much, Ajahn Buddhadāsa gave regular lectures during the monthly international retreats held at Suan Mokkh and then Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage. Usually, Ajahn spoke in Thai and Santikaro Bhikkhu interpreted into English live. All Ajahn's teachings are now available on:

www.suanmokkh.org,

<https://soundcloud.com/buddhadasa> and

<https://www.youtube.com/@buddhadasabhikkhu7829>.

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Today we'll be speaking about the practice of *ānāpānasati*. In particular, we'll be speaking about the practice of the first part of *ānāpānasati*. *Ānāpānasati* or mindfulness of breathing has within it four main groups of things which must be studied. The body is the first which we'll be talking about today. Then there are the other three groups of the feelings, the *citta* or mind, and then Dhamma or truth. So there are these four parts of the practice which we usually call the 'four tetrads' because in each of these parts of the practice, there are four things which must be done. So there are these four parts, each of which have four subparts.

So we'll mention to you now that in this practice of *ānāpānasati*, there are in all 16 steps or 16 Dhammas which must be noted and studied. These 16 Dhammas or things or objects or truths are broken up into four groups and we talked about these four groups yesterday. Today we will speak about the first group, the first four steps or the first four Dhammas which must be noted and studied. These are the four steps, the four Dhammas or truths related specifically to the body, to the *kāya*.

We'll begin from the very beginning. So we will talk about the preliminaries, the preparations for practicing *ānāpānasati*. The first thing we must attend to is our location or the place of practice. We must choose a suitable, appropriate place for the practice of meditation. Now we must choose from among the choices which are available to us which means we're not looking for an ideal situation, but we must find a place that is quiet, peaceful, where the condition, the weather, the atmosphere is appropriate for meditation. We choose a place that is reasonably good. We choose a place that is the best possible choice among the choices available to us. But sometimes we don't have much of a choice, so we take what we have and do the best we can

with it. We choose the best possible conditions that are available, but we don't complain if those conditions are necessary perfect or ideal. For example, when riding on the train coming down from Bangkok or up from Malaysia, the conditions for meditation are not ideal. There's a lot of noise. There's a lot of movement. It's either too cold or too hot. There're many other distracting conditions. But nonetheless, on the train we must be able to meditate. So we use the conditions available to us in the best possible way. This is the first consideration which is to choose the most appropriate place that we can find.

I'd like to add a little bit about meditating on the train. As a meditator, we are not going to be defeated by anything or by any circumstances. Even on the train, we are not going to be defeated by the conditions. So whether we have perfect conditions or not, we will make the most of them. So we will do what we can. On the train, it is still possible to be mindful of one's breathing to the point that one is completely unaware of anything on the train. This is to be not defeated by the train. However, another possibility is if it's very difficult for us to be mindful of our breathing, then we can use the sound of the train itself as our meditation object. The sound of the crack, crack, crack, crack, crack of the wheels on the rails, that can be our meditation object. In this way we use the conditions in the wisest possible way and rather than being defeated, we are victorious.

The next preliminary step is to prepare ourselves physically. We need a body that is suitable for meditation. Specifically, we can prepare our breathing apparatus, the organ that we use for breathing, so that we are ready for meditation. In ancient times and it's still done, one way of preparing the body, specifically the nose, is to take some clean water in the palm of your hands and then draw up into the nose and then blow it out. If we do this two or three or four times, this will clean out the nose and prepare it for the meditation practice. The nose will then be much more sensitive to the breath.

The next item to prepare is the time. We need to choose a time that is suitable and appropriate for meditation. We choose a time of the day that is a good time for us to meditate. However, we needn't develop any absolute time which we bind ourselves to. We don't have to be enslaved to certain times of the day for meditation. When possible, we choose a time of the day when there are no distractions and disturbances. However, in meditation we're actually training the mind to be undisturbed and undistracted no matter what is going on around it. So even if there is no time, we can't find a time that is completely free of distractions, we use the best time that we have, we use what's available. And then the mind learns to be undistracted no matter how many distractions there are. The mind learns to be peaceful no matter how many disturbances there are. So find an appropriate time or appropriate times to meditate. Don't bind yourselves towards any certain times, always be flexible and able to use the circumstances to develop your minds.

The next consideration is what is often called a 'teacher.' In many places there is a meditation teacher but since the Buddha's time, the most proper thing to call this is a 'friend' or a 'good friend,' a 'kallayanamit' in Thai, or 'kallayāṇamitta' in Pāli. A good friend is someone who has experience and knowledge about the meditation practice or whatever it is that we are striving to do. And then we can go to that good friend for advice to help us work through certain problems. They can be of help. But the difference between a good friend and a teacher is that it is not possible to help one to meditate directly. One can only help someone else indirectly. So the idea that someone must sit beside us and tell us everything to do and solve all our problems for us is not in following with this principle. But the idea of a kallayāṇamitta, a good friend, is someone who will answer questions and help us work through some certain obstacles or solve certain

problems as a friend. So this is the next thing which must be prepared – to have a *kallayānamitta* available.

Now it's time to begin talking about the actual activity of meditation itself. The first thing to talk about is posture. In meditation it is absolutely necessary to have a stable posture, to sit in a way that it is stable and secure. What we mean by this is to sit in a way that when the mind enters the state of semiconsciousness, we won't fall over. So this we have to sit in a way that we're not going to fall down no matter what the mind is doing. An example of this is to sit like a pyramid. The pyramids in Egypt or wherever, it is impossible for them to fall down because the way they're constructed – there's a very solid base coming up to a pinnacle and there's no way that they can fall down. So in meditation we must learn to sit like a pyramid. The best way to do this is to sit in a cross-legged fashion. You can put your legs out in front of you like this, and then fold one up on top of the other like this, and then you will have a very stable and secure posture.

For many of you who have never sat this way, who may not even be used to sitting on the floor, it will take some time to train the body to sit in this way, but it is very necessary to develop this posture. So you can patiently gradually train yourself to sit in this way. Put your legs out in front of you and then fold one leg on top and then the other. This way of sitting has been called the 'lotus posture' from very ancient times, from even before the Buddha. This is an ideal way of sitting for meditation practice because it is very stable and there's no way that the body will fall over.

The second aspect of sitting that is very important is that the vertebrae or the spine must be straight. If you sit in a way where the spine is like this or has some curves, then this is not the ideal posture. For good meditation, the vertebrae must sit on top of each other very snugly, so they fit properly, and this means having the spine straight. We call this 'ordinariness' of sitting. This is the normal way of sitting even we don't sit this way. So the first thing in beginning the practice of meditation is to sit properly. Learn to sit in a stable position so that the spine is straight like this, rather than curved in some way. It may not be easy at first but through practice and with patience you will be able to train yourself to sit in this way. For those of you who have never tried this before, it may be difficult at first, but we must request you very strongly to learn how to practice this way of sitting because it is very valuable and important.

At first you may not be able to sit in a full lotus. So at the beginning, just learn to sit with your legs in front of you. They don't have to be fully crossed but just have the legs in front of you in a comfortable position. Then after a while, you can learn to put one leg on top of the other and then you have a half lotus. Later you can learn to put the other leg on top, so then you have a full lotus. This is very compact and stable, and it allows you to sit like a pyramid and then there is no way that you can fall over. So first just put your legs in front of you and then slowly experiment with getting the legs just in front in a comfortable way. Then learn to put one foot on top of the other leg, the other knee or thigh, and then eventually get the second foot on top so that it is a full lotus. When you learn how to do this, you will find it a great use in your meditation and adds much stability.

The spine is also very important. When the spine is curved, the breathing will be different from when the spine is straight. There's a difference. So to do this practice properly, we must learn to sit with the spine straight. This is the ideal way of sitting. So don't try and force yourself to sit this way immediately but with patience and effort you will eventually adjust to this excellent way of sitting.

The next thing to talk about is the hands. The most comfortable, the easiest thing to do with the hands is just to let them fall on the knees. This is easy and comfortable. So you can just put your hands on your knees or another thing is we can fold our hands one on top of the other in our lap. Put one hand in the lap and then the other one on top of it. This is another position of the hands, but we often will experience heat when we do this. So for some people this will be uncomfortable because the hands will become hot if we just put them like this in the lap. There're also some places that teach to put the hands like this so that the thumbs are touching, so to very firmly put the hands together and then put them in the lap. This will aid concentration if we have a very firm position for the hands, but this may also become hot and uncomfortable. So there are these three ways of placing the hands: one – comfortably on the knees, two – relax in a folded relaxing way in the lap, or in this more concentrated way in the lap.

The next matter to talk about are the eyes – whether to leave them open or close them. Many people believe that they have to close their eyes, but this isn't completely true. So we need to give some considerations to whether to close the eyes or leave them open. It's possible when meditating if we are serious about what we are doing and we have a strong intention to practice this meditation technic properly, then it is not difficult to meditate with the eyes open. If you keep the eyes open, then gaze at the tip of the nose. If there is an intention to do this, this is completely possible. It takes a little bit of effort to do so but if we gaze at the tip of the nose, then the eyes will not get involved in other things. When we close our eyes, it's often a way of making us sleepy. So we must be careful about closing our eyes. We might just fall asleep and also when the eyes are closed, the become warm or hot. So to learn to meditate with the eyes open will help us to stay awake and it will keep the eyes cool and comfortable. So there are these two ways – either to meditate with the eyes closed or with them open. Now if you meditate with the eyes open by gazing at the tip of the nose, this will aid the mind in being concentrated. This will aid the development of *samādhi*. As *samādhi* develops, when it has developed about half-way, then the eyes will naturally close by themselves. The eyes will be very relaxed and will drop in a very comfortable way. So you don't have to worry about this. They will close by themselves eventually. So this is the next point – the eyes.

About this point of keeping the eyes open and gazing at the tip of the nose, this in itself is a great deal of concentration. To gaze at the tip of the nose and not be looking at anything else, not get interested in other sights and visions but just to look at the tip, gaze at the tip of the nose – this is an automatic kind of concentration or *samādhi*. So by practicing meditation with the eyes open and gazing at the tip of the nose, the mind is already beginning to develop concentration in being able to do that. This why it is very good to be meditating with the eyes open.

You need to look and observe for yourself that this is something that is absolute possible for the eyes to gaze at the tip of the nose while being aware of breathing in and breathing out. Both of these can be done. It may seem that each's being done at exactly the same instant. But, it's not. We're not talking about anything unnatural or supernatural but because the mind is so fast, it is possible for the eyes to be gazing at the nose while being aware of breathing in and breathing out. This is something that is quite possible to do and you can check this out for yourself.

Now we begin to note the breathing, to focus upon the breathing. This is done with *sati* or mindfulness. Mindfulness is now beginning to be trained and developed by noting the breathing. We talked about the importance of *sati* yesterday. So this is now the beginning of the training and development of this important tool. The way we develop and train *sati* in the beginning is using a technic we call 'following.' With *sati*, the mind follows the breath. We can imagine or

we can make the assumption that the breath, the breathing begins at the tip of the nose and that the in-breath starts at the tip of the nose and flows down to the naval. This is an assumption that we're making. We use this technic. And then the out-breath, once again an assumption, begins at the naval and ends at the tip of the nose. So in training *sati* or mindfulness, the mind follows the breath from the tip of the nose to the naval and then back and it just follows this path from the tip of the nose to the naval and then back without any gaps, without any spaces or lapses. This is called 'following the breath' and it is the first technic we use to train mindfulness. We're not biologists or anatomists. That's why we say that we just make this assumption that the breath begins at the tip of the nose and comes to the naval and then the out-breath begins at the naval and ends at the tip of the nose. This is just an assumption we make based on the feelings, the sensitivity we have of the movement associated with the breath. Actually, we all know that the breath only, the actual air only comes into the lungs but when we breath we feel the movement all the way down to the naval. So at this first step, we use that feeling as the basis of our practice. So the first lesson of *ānāpānasati* is following the breath from the tip of the nose to the naval.

Now the distinction of whether it is mindfulness, *sati*, which follows the breath in and out; or whether the mind because of *sati* follows the breath in and out; or whether *sati* forces the mind to follow the breath in and out – these distinctions are not important at this point. The only thing that matters is that you are able to note the breath, that there is noting of the breath, mindfulness of the breath as it comes from the tip of the nose to the naval and then there is a momentary rest; and then the out-breath from the naval to the tip of the nose and then a short break; and then the breath-in and a short rest; and then the breath-out and another momentary rest. So the mind or whatever, *sati*, must be the mindfulness of breathing in and out, in and out constantly. Now this is the first lesson that must be learn in this practice. It may take three days to be able to do this. It may take three weeks or three months. We're just telling you what needs to be done. We're pointing out the necessary steps of the practice. It's up to you to do it. During this retreat which only lasts ten days, you may not be able to do this completely. That's not an important point. The thing is to know what needs to be done and then start practicing until you can do it. So at this retreat we're telling you what needs to be done. It's up to you to do it. Following the instructions which you are given. After we tell you to practice, then it is up to you to be responsible for following it.

What must be done is for mindfulness to note the breathing in and out. This is trained until it can be done without mindfulness slipping, without the mind wandering off or getting lost anywhere, so that there's mindfulness constantly of the breathing in and out – *sati* or the mind just follows the breathing in and out, in and out. While this is being done, we will naturally learn something about the breathing. We learn about the longness of the breathing and the shortness of the breathing. We also learn about the coarseness, the fineness or subtleness of the breathing, and also about either the ease and comfort, the smoothness of the breathing or when the breath is uncomfortable and not very smooth, or the breath is uneasy. These are things that will naturally be learned because there is mindfulness of the breathing in and out. This is being trained and the same mindfulness will note the longness and shortness, the coarseness and fineness, and the ease or unease of the breathing. This is the first step, is following the breathing and while doing so the mind will also note quite a few things about the breathing so that the breathing is known quite well. This will prepare the mind for the next step of seeing the influence that these different kinds of breathing – long and short, coarse and fine, easy and uneasy – these different facts which these different kinds of breathing have on the body.

Next, we need to observe further the reactions caused by the different kinds of breathing or the influence that these different kinds of breathing have. We need to observe, for instance, what influences does the long breathing has on sensation in the body? What influences does the short breathing has on the bodily sensation? And observe the difference between the sensations caused by long breathing and those that are caused by short breathing. Then we must observe the same thing about coarse breathing and fine breathing. What is the influence of the rough and violence breathing? What are the effects or reactions of the fine or subtle, gentle breathing? And the same must be observed about the breathing when it is comfortable and when it is uncomfortable. What are the various influences between these different kinds of breathing? The different types of breathing have different influences. So we need to see the differences between the influence and effect of long and short breathing, coarse and fine breathing, and comfortable and uncomfortable breathing. What influence this has on the various sensations in the body of which the mind is aware?

Further what needs to be seen or just an extension of what we're talking about a second ago is we need to observe the flavour or the taste of the different kinds of breathing. Each kind of breathing – long and short, coarse and fine, comfortable or uncomfortable – will have a different kind of flavour as felt within the body. For example, the flavour of the long breathing is different than the flavour of the short breathing. So the flavour of the long and short breathing is different. We need to observe this. For example, to observe that the long breathing leads to a greater sense of peace and wellbeing or also to say that from the long breathing there is more happiness. The long breathing gives a happier taste than the short breathing. These different kinds of tastes or flavours that come with different kinds of breathing need to be observed and noted. Finally, we will know the various causes that make the breath different in the various ways. Finally, there will be the knowledge of what makes the breathing long and what makes the breathing short. There will be knowledge of the cause of the fine breathing and the coarse breathing and the causes of the comfortable and uncomfortable breathing. With this knowledge of the different causes – of the different types of breathing, then there will be the ability to influence or to get mastery over the breathing.

With this knowledge, then we are able to control the breathing in different ways and to do so we have a technic which we can call 'counting.' While breathing, we count. For example, breathing in we count from one to five – breathing in count "one, two, three, four, five," and then breathing out, "six, seven, eight, nine, ten." In this way, we can use this to control the breathing. We could count from an in-breath from one to ten if we wish, but to do so the breath will have to be quite long, longer than average. If we want to breath shortly, then we can just count "one, two, three; one, two, three; one, two, three." So using the counting, the length of the breath can be controlled, can be made quite long or can be kept at a medium length by counting to five, or can be short by counting only to three. This is the way of controlling the breath. This isn't done all the time or normally. It's just a little experiment or a bit of a small technic that we can use from time to time in order to control the breathing, but it isn't something we need to do all of the time.

So at this point, with everything that has been done so far, with everything that has been studied and learned, the breath is now understood very completely in great detail. There is very full knowledge of the breathing from studying the different kinds of breathing and from learning how to control the breathing and make it either short or long. We now understand the breath quite well. So we can begin to make the breathing very long.

Now at this point, after we have developed this preliminary understanding of the breathing, we come to the first lesson. This lesson is about the long breathing. Now it is possible to make the breathing long and to keep breathing long. So this is done. In order to study the long breathing in a very complete way. The breath is made long and then is noted and studied so that we can see all the things that we need to know about the long breathing, all the things which are related to the long breathing, all the details of it and all the things that are concerned with it. This is the first lesson – to learn about the long breathing.

In these various things associated with the long breathing, we will come to understand how the body works in relation to the long breathing. When there is a long in-breath, how is the body moving? In what places is there expansion? In what places does the body contract? And when there is a very deep long breath, does the chest expand or contract? Does the abdomen expand or contract? These are things that we can learn. In doing so you may learn that it's not the way you thought it was. Most people tend to think that when we breath in and chest expands, when we breath out and chest contracts. That's all that most people are aware of. But in studying the breath more fully, specially studying very long deep breath, we will find that in breathing in on a very deep breath, at first the abdomen will come in or contract and the chest will expand, and then on breathing out the abdomen will expand and the chest will contract or deflate. We can study this from watching this ourselves.

So in the first lesson of the practice, we learn everything that we can about the nature of the long breathing. This is the first lesson – the nature of the long breathing. So learning what the long breathing is like, what causes it, what influence it has on the body – this is the first lesson of this practice. Of the various things to learn about the long breathing, the most important thing that is learned is the interrelationship between the breathing and the body that the breathing and the body are not separable. So there's a very close and strong relationship between them. This is learned by seeing the different kinds of influence which the long breathing has upon the body. Studying the long breathing and studying this influence, we will see that the ways in which the body and the breathing are interrelated and interconnected.

The second lesson regards the short breathing, and we don't have to say much about it because it's done in exactly the same way as the long breathing. The only difference is that in step two or the second lesson we use the short breathing to study and see the influence that it has on the body. So we do this in exactly the same way that we did it in the first lesson with the long breathing. So in the second lesson we come to know everything that is to know about the short breathing just like we learn about the long breathing. When we have this full understanding of the short breathing, we will know what influence it has on the body. Then we also know the difference between the long breathing and the short breathing. We know the ways that these two kinds of breathing are different, and we know the different influence they have upon the body.

For instance, we know that when the breathing is long, the body will be peaceful and at ease. And we also know when the breathing is short, the body will not be peaceful – it will be agitated and uneasy, uncomfortable. So from this knowledge, now we know how to make the body uncomfortable or comfortable at will. If we want to be comfortable, we make the breathing long. If we'd like for the body to be uncomfortable, then the breathing can be shorten. So through this knowledge, we develop the ability to control the body indirectly by using the breathing. In the second lesson we focus particularly upon the short breathing and in doing so then we have this knowledge which complements the knowledge of the long breathing which was the first lesson.

These differences between the two become very clear. So the second lesson involves the short breathing.

One of the knowledges that we developed that is quite important is that when the breathing is long, it is also gentle and fine, or gentle and peaceful. When the breathing is short, it will be coarse as well. This is seen and then we see that when the breathing is subtle and delicate, that the body relaxes, becomes very calm. And when the breathing is coarse, the body becomes agitated and no longer peaceful. From this knowledge, we learn that in order to calm the body, to relax the body, to quiet down the body, the breath must be made peaceful and gentle which can be done with long breathing. If we want to make the body agitated and uncomfortable, this can be done with coarse breathing which is caused by breathing short. So in this way, the various kinds of knowledge are developed.

Another example we can give you is that when there is anger, the breathing will be short. When the breathing is short, the body is also disturbed. In order to calm that anger through breathing long, then the body will be much more relaxed, and that anger will go away. The anger can be calmed or can be got rid of by breathing long. So this is an example of how the reaction and interrelationship between the breathing and the body and also the mind work. By understanding this interrelationship, this system of cause and effect which is illustrated by the example of anger; how anger will lead to short breathing, and how breathing long can get rid of the anger. This illustrates the interrelationship between the breathing and body and mind. This gives us a key to controlling all of them.

We can summarize all these by saying that it is possible to control and guide and limit the emotion by using the breathing. We can have complete control of the emotions by using the breathing in different ways and this can be learnt by fully studying the breathing in deep detail. This is the fruit of this practice – being able to get control over the emotions through the knowledge we have of the breathing and how the breathing and body and mind are interrelated.

As we develop the ability to control the breathing itself – as we train the breathing to do this or do that, then there is this ability to control the emotions. This is a very important fruit of this practice, of the skills that are being developed here. For example, if when you are sitting posture and the mosquito comes and starts to draw blood out of your arm, and you get angry or you develop some evil kind of emotion towards that mosquito, the way to get rid of this evil emotion is to breath long and in breathing long that evil emotion will go away. This is one of the powers that is developed from this practice.

What needs to be studied in the first lesson about the long breathing and in the second lesson about the short breathing is exactly the same. We need to know the exact same thing about the long breathing and the short breathing. The only difference is that everything is in opposition. The long breathing is opposed to the short breathing and the various things we learn about the two are also complementary same way. In the first two steps of this practice or the first two lessons, we learn about the long breathing and the short breathing. So our time is about up. So for today we will leave the explanation at just the long breathing and the short breathing – the first two steps of the practice of *ānāpānasati*. Now we will ask to close today's meeting.

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Transcribed and lightly edited by Pranee & Supavadee in 2024

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