

# *Using Anāpānasati in the Household Life*

by Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Interpreted into English by Santikaro Bhikkhu

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*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. Audio recordings are now available from [www.suanmokkh.org](http://www.suanmokkh.org) and [www.bia.or.th](http://www.bia.or.th). The following is a transcription generously made by a Dhamma volunteer. If you noticed possible improvements to the text and would like to contribute, please kindly contact the volunteer and the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives in Bangkok ([suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com](mailto:suanmokkhbkk@gmail.com)).*

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Today we'll speak about using *ānāpānasati* beneficially in the household life. You shouldn't think that *ānāpānasati* is only for those who are *anāgārika* – those who are homeless such as monks and nuns living in the monastery. *Anāpānasati* is something that can be used successfully and beneficially even for those who are following the household life with a home and possessions and family and all those ordinary business things.

We should know that *ānāpānasati* has existed for a long, long time. It existed in a form of an art or as a form of culture since long, long ago, way before even the Buddha's time. Even way back then human beings understood how to use the breath, how to breathe in the most beneficial way for carrying on life. The name for the technique is called 'breath control' (*prāṇāyāma*) which has been studied and practiced since before the Buddha's time and then on over the centuries until even nowadays we are practicing it.

Even long ago, ordinary people wanted to have a kind of breathing which was most beneficial and they were interested in having the most correct kind of breathing so that they could sweep away any harmful moods or emotions which took over the mind. Even ordinary people learnt how to breathe correctly so that these harmful emotions could be gotten rid of immediately.

This knowledge goes back so far that we have to call it since immemorial times. This knowledge of the breathing was explored so that people could get rid of any harmful thoughts and feelings which came into the mind. And then the powers of ānāpānasati was studied more and more until it could be used as a basis for certain very miraculous powers even things like being able to float and fly through the air. This kind of study and knowledge became more and more well-known until that even ordinary people were interested in using the breathing properly so that they could breathe correctly and be at ease and at peace at any time. And so if certain kinds of feelings came over them they could use the breathing to make it long and relaxed in order to sweep those feelings out of the mind. This is, if you think about it most natural for example when we yawn. Even though we are not doing it intentionally you can see how a yawn is a natural way of correcting the breathing to help us to relax and be calm, and things like this show how we can use ānāpānasati to keep our life peaceful, correct, and balanced.

The prince Siddhattha who eventually became the Buddha, there is a story of how when he was only seven years old he was able to do ānāpānasati. Even at the age of seven he was able to develop this and as it says in the book there arose the strength of mind that he could keep the shadows from changing, the shadows made by the sun shining on trees or whatever – normally these are constantly moving but he was able to keep them from moving because of this strength that came from ānāpānasati. This is what it says in the old books. Or abilities like being able to make everyone present, see something that isn't really there, all kinds of things like this are attributed to the strength and power that can come once ānāpānasati has been developed correctly. And so it became very, very ordinary back in those days that even children could cultivate this. And then especially young men and young women would give attention to this so that their minds would be trained and further developed and they would get the benefits of such well-developed minds. Back then it was quite an ordinary thing.

Back in those days it was such an ordinary thing, all kinds of people were using this in their ordinary lives, in ordinary homes. But then when we come to this time it's just about disappeared, nobody is using it, and so this understanding, this skill has been lost. So we ought to go and research it and study it anew and then to start this knowledge and understanding up again in

this later time. It's something that can't just be left in the monasteries or in special meditation centers, it's something that needs to belong in every home. Nowadays, we use the word 'domestic' about all kinds of things that we use to fill our houses but we only use the word domestic about material goods and possessions; we never use the word domestic about mental things, spiritual things. Let's start to use, expand the use of the word domestic to mental and spiritual things and let's start to bring the practice of ānāpānasati into all our homes so that it is no longer something strange but something very ordinary like it used to be. Then if we can do this, if ānāpānasati is just an ordinary part of domestic life then a certain condition will also return, the condition that we will be able to sweep away any harmful, any ugly moods which arise as soon as we need to.

So now we are going to talk about these harmful moods and emotions once again. We'll go through them word by word: love; anger; hatred; fear; excitement; worry; anxiety; worry and anxiety about the future; and then longing after the past; envy; jealousy, the special kind of jealous possessiveness between husbands and wives; and then the inclination to always feel that things are either positive or negative.

These are only examples of the various harmful moods that can occur but these examples are enough for you to understand the problem that we are talking about and the damage they can do. Anāpānasati is able to sweep them away quickly, immediately. Anyone who is expert at ānāpānasati can get rid of any of these evil moods with just one breath.

Anyone who has practiced up through step four where one is able to calm the breathing to make it very very peaceful and subtle and thereby calm the body: anyone who is expert at this will be able to calm away any harmful emotion with just one breath, just one in-breath and it can be swept away, calmed completely.

This is something extremely ordinary, it can happen naturally without our even doing so intentionally. If you observe carefully in life you will see that there are times when the deep long breath occurs naturally, spontaneously. Such as when we sometimes yawn or a long gob, relaxed gob of air which relaxes the body and quiets the mind. This can happen naturally but we can even do better

than that by training and developing as we do in our practice here. We can develop this to the point where we can intentionally get rid of any of those harmful emotions with just one breath, one quick breath. This will be of very great benefit in our ordinary daily life especially at home.

For example when it's time to go for a sleep but you are unable to sleep because of some bad moods or disturbing thoughts tormenting you. If you study the breathing as we are doing here and develop it correctly then you will be able to drive off, to chase away those bad moods or whatever it is that is keeping you awake and then you will be able to go to sleep. Or even if there is nothing keeping us awake just before we go to sleep, we use the breathing to prepare ourselves and then stay with the breathing until we fall off asleep, then we will sleep more soundly, more deeply, more restfully than otherwise. These are perfect examples from the household life, something that applies in every home, how we can use ānāpānasati to free ourselves from those bad moods and emotions which are messing up ordinary life.

The second item is that by practicing ānāpānasati we will have four things which are of tremendous value in daily life. These four are *sati* (mindfulness), *paññā* (wisdom), *sampajañña* (clear or ready comprehension, wisdom in action) and then *samādhi* (concentration, collectedness). Having these four things is essential to lead a peaceful and healthy life. Through practicing ānāpānasati we will not only have all four of these things but we will have enough of them, they will be sufficient for our needs. So there are *sati*, mindfulness, *paññā*, wisdom, *sampajañña*, clear comprehension, and *samādhi*, concentration, these will be there in sufficient strength for all your needs. We'd like to call these 'the four comrades' because they work together in a very important way.

Let us give you an easy ordinary example of how this works. In ordinary life when any sight, sound, smell, touch, whatever makes contact with the mind there has to be *sati* first of all. When anything has made contact with the mind there must be mindfulness there, this is first. Then mindfulness goes and recollects wisdom, it recollects wisdom and then brings the wisdom, it transports the wisdom that we have studied, that we have gained already. We can get this wisdom from studying, from ordinary learning, or it can be the wisdom that arises through training in ānāpānasati, or whatever kind of wisdom, ordinary knowledge or deeper understanding that we have gained, mindfulness

can transport it through this specific situation that has arisen at the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. When it's just generally stored with knowledge we call it 'wisdom,' *paññā*. But when that knowledge, that wisdom comes and is applied in a specific situation for a specific event its name changes and we call it *sampajañña*, ready wisdom, ready knowledge, or sometimes translated 'clear comprehension.' When it's a duty-specific wisdom we call it *sampajañña*, the knowledge you need to deal specifically with this function, this duty we could call it 'function-specific wisdom,' this we call *sampajañña*. And then maybe the mind's strength is weak, the mental power is a bit weak so then there must be *samādhi*, concentration must come in and support these other factors with its strength and power. These are the four comrades, the four Dhamma comrades that work together in this way, something very important in ordinary life.

Think about this example, the gun that you have got locked up in the closet and the gun that you use to shoot the dangerous criminal; there are two different kinds of gun but on the other hand it's the same gun. There's the gun that we got locked away here and then there's the gun that we use to shoot, shoot this dangerous criminal. In one way it's two different guns and then in another way it's the same gun. Your thinking about this will help you to understand what we mean by wisdom which we have developed and stored, and then *sampajañña* that duty-specific wisdom that we use for just this situation here. To get the gun there has to be mindfulness first, to retrieve the gun, and then that wisdom becomes *sampajañña*, and then to pull the trigger and shoot and aim properly and do all these things takes mental energy, takes concentration, *samādhi*. So that's how the four comrades work together.

If you don't have any mindfulness all your knowledge and understanding is utterly useless. Without mindfulness all these things we've learnt in life and most of us – most of you have been to university and have read all kinds of books and have crammed your heads full of all kinds of knowledge and information – but without mindfulness you cannot use any of it, it's just a waste. So first of all there has to be mindfulness and then, with it, we can retrieve that knowledge, understanding, and wisdom that we have developed and then it's that function or duty-specific wisdom that we call *sampajañña*. And then sufficient energy is provided by *samādhi*, enough energy that we can penetrate the problem. There are all these problems facing us in this busy modern world, this world is full of all kinds of things coming to trouble us and

so we need this mindfulness and this wisdom and then have to apply it correctly to the situation as *sampajañña* and then have enough mental strength to penetrate and pass through the problem. These four comrades are essential in modern life. The more complicated, the more developed that modern life gets, the more that these things are necessary. Without them you will have great difficulty surviving. So through training in *ānāpānasati* we develop these four comrades so that we've got them in sufficient strength to use them in our ordinary daily life.

In practicing the first stage of *ānāpānasati* regarding body (the *kaya*) then we develop quite a bit of *sati* and *sampajañña* regarding the body and just ordinary physical matters. And then through practicing in the other stages this *sati* and *sampajañña* is developed further and further so that it can be used regarding all kinds of things. *Sati-sampajañña* regarding the feelings is developed in the second stage about the *vedanā* – ‘contemplation of *vedanā*.’ So that we have plenty of mindfulness and ready wisdom which to deal with any of these pleasant and unpleasant and neutral feelings that come up in life. In the last stage dealing with Dhamma this is where *paññā*, wisdom, really develops – where the wisdom about all things, about all natures, a deep and penetrating understanding of nature. And then in the third area, the third stage about the *citta*, this is where *samādhi* is really refined and perfected. If we train in all four areas sufficiently then these four comrades will have them more than enough, there will even be plenty left over of these four comrades if we train in all four areas of *ānāpānasati*.

Imagine a person and there's lots of them who study at many universities, so they have gotten a long tail of diplomas wagging behind them and they've got all this knowledge and all this wisdom that is stored up but that is all they've got, they've got piles and piles of wisdom but if they do not have any mindfulness, it is all just a waste. This is the situation we've got in the world; we've got a modern education where we get a lot of intelligence, knowledge, and information; just a bunch of wisdom but no mindfulness, no ready wisdom, no applied wisdom and no *samādhi*. So we've got all this knowledge, this wisdom flooding our minds and we're not able to use it because our education is incomplete. We need to have a kind of education that is complete, that develops all four of these comrades. And then if we also develop mindfulness and *sampajañña* and *samādhi*, concentration, then all that wisdom we picked up, all

that understanding will become useful. Now it's useless, it's meaningless, it's just stored away; it doesn't do any good. In fact it often is even worse, it often is merely a bunch of cleverness, all this intelligence can become just clever and often it rebels. Without mindfulness and wisdom in action and samādhi, all this knowledge can rebel and cause us, lead to all kinds of craving, attachment, all kinds of out of control thoughts, defilements and of course a lot of pain and misery. So we need to have correct, complete, balanced education that not only develops wisdom but that trains mindfulness, duty-specific wisdom, and samādhi.

The third item is that we will have sense organs which are much more powerful than ordinary. We'll be able to see things, hear things, smell things and so on in a way that is much more sensitive, much more receptive, much more powerful than ordinary. With mindfulness and wisdom in action, with concentration the sense organs will function in a very efficient, a most efficient way and their abilities will be greatly expanded.

There's a secret here that you probably haven't even realized; you may not even be aware that these sense organs of ours are tremendously inefficient or the way they are ordinarily. When we say they're inefficient what we mean is that we look but we do not see; we listen but we don't hear; and the same with all the rest. We look at things, we look at them but we don't really see them deeply, we don't really see them truthfully, profoundly. There is not enough mindfulness and ready comprehension to really see things as they are. We listen, we listen but we don't have the mindfulness and sampajañña to really hear and in this way our sense organs are tremendously inefficient; we are not using their capability nearly as much as we could. This is something that should be understood because, through ānāpānasati, we can have the sati and sampajañña to use these sense organs most effectively, most efficiently, so we will really see, really hear, really smell and so on.

You ought to increase the efficiency and the power of your sense organs: these eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind, you ought to develop them through ānāpānasati – developing sati-sampajañña and so on, so that these sense organs will be most effective and that will help you to cope with this tremendously busy chaotic world of ours in which things are moving so fast, happening so quickly that we can barely keep up. If we develop these eyes, ears,

nose, tongue, body, and mind so they're most efficient then we'll be able to deal with all this modern chaos and confusion. Please give attention to this.

The fourth item is that we can have happiness immediately as soon as we want it, as soon as we need it, anytime, anyplace, any situation where we need some happiness we can have it immediately; don't have to wait even a second. Because we have trained in *ānāpānasati* specifically through our practice with the *vedanā* – the second stage or tetrad, we can have *pīti* and *sukha* whenever we want, wherever we want as they need them. We will be able to have them whenever, wherever, in the strength, in the quantity, for the duration that we choose. We develop these things and work with these things so that we can call them up whenever we need them; do not have to wait even a bit. It is like having a genie who can give us these things whenever we need them. This is something that will come through training in *ānāpānasati*.

The fifth item is that we will be able to reach to, attain to, or become one with the supreme thing, the supreme highest thing. You can call this 'God' if you want but here we call it 'Nibbāna.' Through *ānāpānasati* we come closer, closer, closer, and closer to this supreme thing, to Nibbāna until we penetrate into and are one with it. Through *ānāpānasati* you can be one with God or one with Nibbāna, one with this highest, this supreme thing, whatever we call it, we can get closer and closer until being one with it. This is the fifth item.

This thing, Nibbāna is that which is above all suffering, all pain, all *dukkha*. To come closer and closer to this supreme thing is to be beyond all problems. In Dhamma language we say it is 'to be above the world,' to be beyond the world, to transcend all the worldly conditions and the problems and the hassles that come with it. This is Nibbāna – to be completely free of all pain, all defilement, all *dukkha*. Through *ānāpānasati* we can come closer and closer to this highest thing. This is how we can use *ānāpānasati* even in daily life, this is not anything special that needs to be left in the monastery. This supreme thing is everywhere, even at home, and so we can use *ānāpānasati* to come closer and closer to it even in the household until becoming one with it even at home. So please have *ānāpānasati* as a domestic thing; it is not something just for the monastery. You can have it to benefit you even at home, to protect you, to solve problems, to give up or renounce anything that we have to get rid of, it can help us in all ways if we have it as part of our domestic equipment.

So in summary we can say that we have ‘almighty breathing,’ we have breathing that can be used whenever we need it, we can call on it to do whatever task we needed to do, and so we call it ‘almighty,’ ‘almighty breathing.’ This is our summary of the fruits and benefits of mindfulness with breathing.

It’s raining now so we will end the talk at this time.

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Transcribed by S. Kongpermwong (*s.kongpermwong@gmail.com*) in March-June 2015

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