

THE DISCOURSE ON MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

Ānāpānasati Sutta
(*Majjhima Nīkāya* 118)¹

Translated by Gil Fronsdal

I have heard it this way:

Once the Blessed One was staying at Sāvathī, in the Eastern Park in the Palace of Mīgīra’s mother together with a large number of well-known Elder Disciples [including] Venerable Sāriputta, Venerable Mahā-Moggallāna, Venerable Mahā-Kassapa, Venerable Mahā-Kaccāna, Venerable Mahā-Koṭṭhita, Venerable Mahā-Kappina, Venerable Mahā-Cunda, Venerable Anuruddha, Venerable Revata, Venerable Ānanda, and other well-known elder disciples.

Now on that occasion elder monks were teaching and instructing new monks: some elder monks were teaching and instructing ten monks, some elder monks were teaching and instructing twenty... thirty.... forty monks. The new monks were realizing² great and successive attainments.³

Now on that occasion, on the observance day of the fifteenth [day of the lunar month] during the full moon night of the *Pavāraṇā* [ceremony], the Blessed One was seated in the open air surrounded by the community of monks.

Looking over the silent community of monks, he addressed them, “Monks, I am pleased⁴ with this practice. I am pleased at heart⁵ with this practice. Therefore, monks, initiate even more energy⁶ for attaining the unattained, reaching the unreached, seeing what has not been seen.⁷ I will stay right here in Sāvathī through the full moon day of the fourth month (of the rains retreat).⁸

Monks from the countryside heard, “The Blessed One, it is said, will stay right there in Sāvathī until the full moon of the fourth month.” They then left for Sāvathī to see the Blessed One.

The Elder monks then taught and instructed the new monks even more fully: some elder monks were teaching and instructing ten monks, some elder monks were teaching and

¹ Further teachings on the topic of *ānāpānasati* is found in pages 1765-1787 of the Connected Discourses of the Buddha (*Samyutta Nīkāya* V.54) translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi.

² *Pajānāti* (knowing)

³ *visesam* (excellence, distinction, extra-ordinary states, attainments). This term is used in elsewhere (MN 76 [PTS 522]) to refer to attainments of the first four jhanas as well as the attainment of recollection of past lives, knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings and knowledge of the destruction of the toxins (*āsavas*). See, for example *Majjhima Nikaya* 76 and 31.10.

⁴ *Āraaddha* (past participle of *ārajhati*, to please, to satisfy).

⁵ *Citta* – often translated as mind or as state of mind.

⁶ *virīya*

⁷ *Asacchikatassa sacchikiriyāya*. *Sacchikiriyā* is more commonly translated as realization. It is a compound made from of *sa* (with) + *akkhi* (eyes) + *karoti* (to make, act, do) which could be translated as “to see with one’s own eyes.”

⁸ i.e. one more lunar month.

instructing twenty... thirty.... forty monks. The new monks were realizing great and successive attainments.

Now on that occasion, on the observance day of the fifteenth [day of the lunar month] during the full moon of the fourth month, the Blessed One was seated in the open air surrounded by the community of monks. Looking over the silent community of monks, he addressed them, “Monks, the assembly is without frivolous talk⁹; the assembly is free of frivolous talk; the assembly is established on pure heartwood.¹⁰ Such is this community of monks; such is this assembly.

“[It is] an assembly worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of gifts,¹¹ worthy of *añjali*;¹² it is an unsurpassable field of merit for the world. Such is this community of monks; such is this assembly.

“A small gift to this assembly becomes great, and a great gift becomes greater. Such is this community of monks; such is this assembly.

“It is difficult for the world to get to see such an assembly. Such is this community of monks; such is this assembly.

“It is an assembly suitable to travel many leagues, carrying a travel bag, to see.

“Monks, in this community of monks there are monks who are arhats who have destroyed their toxins,¹³ are accomplished, done what had to be done, put down their load¹⁴, reached the true goal,¹⁵ destroyed completely the fetter of becoming, and freed through right knowledge.¹⁶ Monks, there are monks like this in this community of monks.

“Monks, in this community of monks there are monks who, by destroying the five lower fetters,¹⁷ will [after dying] reappear [in the heavenly world of the Pure Abode] and there be fully released¹⁸ without returning from that world. Monks, there are monks like this in this community of monks.

“Monks, in this community of monks there are monks who, with the destruction of three fetters and the diminishing of greed, hate, and delusion, are once returners who will return only once to this world¹⁹ to make an end to suffering. Monks, there are monks like this in this community of monks.

⁹ *Apalāpāyam* = *a* (not/without) + *palāpa* (meaning chaff but commonly used to refer to inessential talk, prattling, nonsense).

¹⁰ *sara* = the innermost, the hardest part of something, the heart or pith of a tree. It can also be used to refer to what is essential, excellent.

¹¹ *Āhuneyya*, *pāhuneyya*, *dakkhiṇeyya*

¹² *Añjali* = gesture of respect and reverence, done by touching fingers together and lifting hands to one’s head.

¹³ *asava*

¹⁴ *bhāga*

¹⁵ *sadattthā* = *sant* (true, real, good) + *attha* (goal, truth, ideal).

¹⁶ *Samma* (right, perfect) + *aññā* (knowledge, insight)

¹⁷ The five lower fetters are sensuous craving, ill-will, beliefs of identity (*sakkāyadiṭṭi*), doubt (*vikikicchā*), and attachment to virtue and religious practice (*sīlabbataparāmāso*). The five higher fetters which are overcome with arhatship are craving for refined material existence/states (*rūpa rāga*), craving for immaterial existence/states (*arūpa rāga*), conceit (*māna*), restlessness (*uddacca*), and ignorance (*avijjā*).

¹⁸ *parinibbāyino*

¹⁹ I.e., will be reborn as humans only once more.

“Monks, in this community of monks there are monks who, with the destruction of the three fetters, are stream-enterers incapable of falling into ruin,²⁰ assured, proceeding to full awakening. Monks, there are monks like this in this community of monks.

“Monks, in this community of monks there are monks who abide engaged in the practice of cultivating the four applications of mindfulness. Monks, there are monks like this in this community of monks.

“Monks, in this community of monks there are monks who abide engaged in the practice of cultivating the four right efforts, ... the four bases of power, ... the five faculties, ... the five strengths, ... the seven factors of awakening, ... the noble eightfold path. Monks, there are monks like this in this community of monks.

“Monks, in this community of monks there are monks who abide engaged in the practice of cultivating loving-kindness, ... compassion, ... appreciative joy, ... equanimity, ... [the reflection] of the unappealing, ... the perception of impermanence. Monks, there are monks like this in this community of monks.

“Monks, in this community of monks there are monks who abide engaged in the practice of cultivating mindfulness of breathing in and out. Monks, mindfulness of breathing in and out is of great fruit and of great benefit when cultivated and made much of. When cultivated and made much of, mindfulness of breathing in and breathing out brings the four applications of mindfulness to fulfillment.²¹ When cultivated and made much of, the four applications of mindfulness bring the seven factors of awakening to fulfillment. When cultivated and made much of, the seven factors of awakening bring Knowledge and Freedom²² to fulfillment.

[Mindfulness of Breathing In and Out]

“And how, monks, is mindfulness of breathing in and out of great fruit and of great benefit when cultivated and made much of?

“Here, monks, having gone to the wilderness, a foot of a tree, or an empty building, a monk sits down with legs crossed and body erect. Establishing²³ mindfulness to the forefront,²⁴ always attentive he breathes in with mindfulness and breathes out with mindfulness.

“Breathing in long he knows²⁵ ‘I am breathing in long.’

Breathing in short he knows ‘I am breathing in short.’ [1]

Breathing out long he knows ‘I am breathing out long.’

Breathing out short he knows ‘I am breathing in short.’ [2]

²⁰ *vinipāta* from *nipātetī* meaning to fall; refers to falling into a place of suffering, e.g., hell.

²¹ *Paripūreti* (to fill up, make more full, bring to fulfillment)

²² *Vijja vimutti*

²³ *Upaṭṭhāpetvā* (having established, having applied).

²⁴ *Parimukham* literally means around (*pari*) the mouth or face (*mukham*). In the *Vinaya* (Culavagga 5.27.4) it refers to a monk’s chest. In this regard it could mean “to the front” or “to the front of the body.” In Sanskrit it can also mean around or about any person (Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit English Dictionary* p 599). With this meaning it could perhaps be translated “around himself.”

²⁵ *Pajānāti* (“knows”) It is a compound of the verb *jānāti* (to know) and the intensifying prefix *pa*.

He trains himself ‘breathing in, I experience²⁶ the whole body.’
‘breathing out, I experience the whole body.’[3]

He trains himself, ‘breathing in, I calm the bodily formation.’²⁷
‘breathing out, I calm the bodily formation.’ [4]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in experiencing joy.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out experiencing joy.’[5]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in experiencing pleasure.’²⁸
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out experiencing pleasure. [6]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in experiencing mental formation.’²⁹
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out experiencing mental formation.’[7]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in calming the mental formation.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out calming the mental formation.’[8]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in experiencing the mind.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out experiencing the mind.’[9]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in pleasing³⁰ the mind.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out pleasing the mind.’[10]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in concentrating the mind.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out concentrating the mind.’[11]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in releasing the mind.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out releasing the mind.’[12]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in observing³¹ impermanence.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out observing impermanence.’[13]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in observing dispassion.’³²

²⁶ *paṭisamvedī: pati* = toward, sam = with or toward, *vedi* = to experience and to know. I have translated it as experience, in part, so to differentiate it from *pajanāti* (to know).

²⁷ *Kāya* (body) + *saṅkhāram* (formation, conditioned phenomenon).

²⁸ *Sukha*, often translated as happiness.

²⁹ *Citta* (mind, mental state) + *saṅkhāram* (formation, conditioned phenomenon).

³⁰ *Abhippamodayam* (to please, to satisfy, to rejoice).

³¹ *anupassī*

³² *Virāga: Rāga* means color or dye but is commonly used to refer to lust. Thus, *virāga* is the absence of lust (i.e., dispassion) or the absence of dye/stain (faded).

He trains himself, ‘I will breath out observing dispassion.’[14]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in observing cessation.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out observing cessation.’[15]

He trains himself, ‘I will breath in observing relinquishment.’
He trains himself, ‘I will breath out observing relinquishment.’[16]

“Monks, this is how cultivating and making much of mindfulness of breathing in and breathing out is of great fruit and great benefit.

[Fulfilling the Four Applications of Mindfulness]

“Monks, how, when cultivated and made much of, does mindfulness of breathing in and breathing out bring the four applications of mindfulness to fulfillment?

“Monks, on whatever occasion a monk

breathing in long knows³³ ‘I am breathing in long;’
breathing in short knows ‘I am breathing in short;’ [1]

breathing out long knows ‘I am breathing out long;’
breathing out short knows ‘I am breathing in short;’ [2]

trains himself ‘breathing in, I experience the whole body;’
‘breathing out, I experience the whole body;’[3]

trains himself, ‘breathing in, I calm the bodily formation;’
‘breathing out, I calm the bodily formation,’ [4]

then on that occasion the monk dwells observing the body in itself – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful – having put aside greed and distress for the world. I say, monks, that this is a kind of body among bodies- i.e., breathing in and breathing out. That is why the monk on that occasion abides observing the body in itself – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful – having put aside greed and distress for the world.

“Monks, on whatever occasion a monk

trains himself, ‘I will breath in experiencing joy;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out experiencing joy;’[5]

trains himself, ‘I will breath in experiencing pleasure;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out experiencing pleasure; [6]

³³ *Pajānāti* (“knows”) It is a compound of the verb *jānāti* (to know) and the intensifying prefix *pa*.

trains himself, ‘I will breath in experiencing mental formation;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out experiencing mental formation;’[7]

trains himself, ‘I will breath in calming the mental formation;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out calming the mental formation;’[8]

then on that occasion the monk is dwelling observing feeling tones in themselves – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful – having put aside greed and distress for the world. I say, monks, that this is a kind feeling tone among feeling tones – i.e., breathing in and breathing out. That is why the monk on that occasion abides observing feeling tones in themselves – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful – having put aside greed and distress for the world.

“Monks, on whatever occasion a monk

trains himself, ‘I will breath in experiencing the mind;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out experiencing the mind;’[9]

trains himself, ‘I will breath in pleasing the mind;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out pleasing the mind;’[10]

trains himself, ‘I will breath in concentrating the mind;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out concentrating the mind;’[11]

trains himself, ‘I will breath in releasing the mind;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out releasing the mind;’[12]

then on that occasion the monk is dwelling observing the mind in itself – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful – having put aside greed and distress for the world. I do not say there is cultivation of mindfulness of breathing for someone forgetful of mindfulness, who is without clear comprehension. That is why the monk on that occasion abides observing the mind in itself – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful – having put aside greed and distress for the world.

“Monks, on whatever occasion a monk

trains himself, ‘I will breath in observing impermanence;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out observing impermanence;’[13]

trains himself, ‘I will breath in observing dispassion;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out observing dispassion;’[14]

trains himself, ‘I will breath in observing cessation;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out observing cessation;’[15]

trains himself, ‘I will breath in observing relinquishment;’
trains himself, ‘I will breath out observing relinquishment,’[16]

then on that occasion the monk is dwelling observing dharmas in themselves – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful – having put aside greed and distress for the world. Having seen with wisdom the giving up of greed and distress one is someone who ‘looks on with equanimity’³⁴ Because of this, on that occasion the monk dwells observing dharmas in themselves – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful – having put aside greed and distress for the world.

“Monks, this is how, when cultivated and made much, mindfulness of breathing in and breathing out brings the four applications of mindfulness to fulfillment.

[Fulfilling the Seven Factors of Awakening]

“Monks, how, cultivated and made much of, does the four applications of mindfulness bring the seven factors of awakening to fulfillment?

“Monks, on whatever occasion a monk dwells in observing the body it itself – ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, having put aside greed and distress for the world, then on that occasion mindfulness is established³⁵ without confusion. Monks on whatever occasion mindfulness is established without confusion, then on that occasion the awakening factor of mindfulness has activated³⁶ for that monk. On that occasion the monk cultivates the awakening factor of mindfulness. Cultivated, the awakening factor of mindfulness goes to fulfillment.

“Dwelling mindful in this way, he examines, investigates, and thoroughly considers³⁷ that dharma³⁸ with wisdom. Monks, on whatever occasion a monk dwells in mindfulness and examines, investigates, and thoroughly considers that dharma with wisdom, then on that occasion the awakening factor of investigation of dharmas is activated for that monk. On that occasion the monk cultivates the awakening factor of the investigation of dharmas. Cultivated, the awakening factor of the investigation goes to fulfillment.

“In someone for whom examination, investigation and thorough consideration of that dharma with wisdom is undertaken, unhesitating³⁹ energy is activated. Monks, on that occasion that a monk examines, investigates and thoroughly considers that dharma with wisdom and unhesitating energy is activated, then on that occasion the awakening factor of energy is activated for that monk. On that occasion the monk cultivates the awakening factor of energy. Cultivated, the awakening factor of energy goes to fulfillment.

³⁴ *ajjhupekkhitā*= *abhi* (heightened or special) + *upe* (upon) + *iks* (see)

³⁵ *upaññhitassu*

³⁶ *Āraddha* (begun, started, bent on, holding on to, resolved, aroused, firm)

³⁷ *Pari* (thorough, complete) + *vīmaṇsa* (consider, examine)

³⁸ *Dhamma* (state, quality, thing, the Buddha’s teaching). It is possible that the *dhamma* being referred to is the awakening factor of mindfulness just mentioned.

³⁹ *Asallīnam* (not sluggish or cowering; Ajhan Thanissaro translates it as unflaggingly, Bhikkhu Bodhi has tireless)

“When energy has taken hold, non-physical joy arises. Monks, on that occasion when a non-physical joy arises for a monk whose energy is activated, then at that occasion the awakening factor of joy is activated for that monk. On that occasion the monk cultivates the awakening factor of joy. Cultivated, the awakening factor of joy goes to fulfillment.

“With the mind⁴⁰ joyful, the body becomes tranquil and the state of mind⁴¹ becomes tranquil. Monks, on that occasion when the mind is joyful, the monk’s body becomes tranquil and his state of mind becomes tranquil, then on that occasion the awakening factor of tranquility is activated for that monk. On that occasion the monk cultivates the awakening factor of tranquility. Cultivated, the awakening factor of tranquility goes to fulfillment.

“Experiencing pleasure⁴² and with the body tranquil the state of mind becomes concentrated. Monks, on that occasion when, experiencing pleasure and with the body tranquil, someone becomes concentrated, then on that occasion the awakening factor of concentration is activated for that monk. On that occasion the monk cultivates the awakening factor of concentration. Cultivated, the awakening factor of concentration goes to fulfillment.

“Whose state of mind is thus steadied looks on with equanimity. Monk, when a monk whose mind state is thus steadied looks on with equanimity, then on that occasion the awakening factor of equanimity is activated for that monk. On that occasion the monk cultivates the awakening factor of equanimity. Cultivated, the awakening factor of equanimity goes to fulfillment.

“Monks, on whatever occasion a monk abides observing feeling tones in feeling tones... mind states in mind states.... dharmas in dharmas... On that occasion, through cultivation, the awakening factor of equanimity is brought to fulfillment for that monk.

“Monks, this is how, when cultivated and made much of, the four foundations of mindfulness bring the seven factors of awakening to fulfillment.

[Fulfilling Knowledge and Freedom]

“Monks, how, cultivated and made much of, does the seven factors of awakening bring knowledge and freedom to fulfillment?

“Here, monks, a monk cultivates the awakening factor of mindfulness supported⁴³ by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and maturing in relinquishment⁴⁴ He cultivates the awakening factor of the investigation of dharmas, energy... joy... tranquility... concentration... equanimity... and maturing in relinquishment.

“Monks, this is how, when cultivated and made much of, the seven factors of awakening bring knowledge and freedom to fulfillment.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Inspired,⁴⁵ the monks were delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

⁴⁰ *mano*

⁴¹ *citta*

⁴² *sukhino*

⁴³ *nissita*

⁴⁴ *Vossagga*. According to Buddhaghosa, *vossagga* means both ‘giving up’ and ‘entering into’ nibbana.

⁴⁵ *Attamana* (delighted, gratified, satisfied); *atta* (taken up, lifted up) + *mano* (mind).