

ANAPANASATI SUTTA

Buddha Shakyamuni (Pali Canon, Majjhima Nikaya 118)

Cultivating Awareness with Breathing

INTRODUCTION¹

1. Thus I have heard: Once the Exalted One stayed near Savatthi in the Eastern Park, at the palace of Migara's mother, together with many well-known elder disciples — such as the Venerables Shariputta, Maha Moggallana, Maha Kassapa, Maha Kaccayana, Maha Kotthita, Maha Kappina, Maha Cunda, Anuruddha, Revata, and Ananda.

2. During that time the elder monks² [and nuns] in the community were teaching and instructing the younger monks [and nuns]; some were teaching ten, some twenty, others thirty and some were teaching and instructing forty— and the new monks [and nuns] thus experienced progressive levels of great excellence.

3. It was on the full moon night at the end of their [three months] retreat during the closing ceremony³. The Exalted One, seated in the open air, surrounded by the community of monks [and nuns], surveyed the silent sangha and said to them:

4. Venerable Practitioners, I am content at heart with the fruits of your practice. However, please now arouse perseverance that is even more joyful in order to attain what you have not yet attained, to reach what you have not yet reached, to realize what you have not yet realized. I will remain right here, at Savatthi, until the next full moon.

5. The monks [and nuns] all over the country heard this and travelled to Savatthi to practice near the Exalted One.

6. Then the elder monks [and nuns] taught and instructed the new monks [and nuns] even more intensely and the new monks [and nuns] thus experienced further levels of great excellence.

7. On the following full-moon night, the Exalted One, seated in the open air, surrounded by the community of monks [and nuns], surveyed the silent sangha and said to them:

8. Venerable practitioners, this assembly is free from idle chatter and idle talk. It is established on [a wholesome conduct which is like] pure heartwood and is thus worthy of offerings, worthy of hospitality, worthy of respect; it is an incomparable field of merit for the world. If to this sort of assembly one gives a small gift, it becomes great, and a great gift becomes even greater. Such an assembly is rare to find in the world and it is worth traveling for leagues, carrying provisions, in order to see it.

9. In this community there are monks [and nuns] who are arhats: their mental effluents⁴ have been dried up, they have reached fulfilment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, broken the fetters of becoming⁵, and are released through right understanding.

10. Other monks [and nuns] in this community have dissolved the first five fetters. They will be born instantly [in the Pure Abodes] and attain nirvana without ever returning from that world.

11. Other monks [and nuns] have already dissolved three fetters, accompanied by the attenuation of desire, hatred, and delusion; as once-returners, they will return only one more time to this world to finish with *dukkha*.

12. Other monks [and nuns] have dissolved three fetters; as stream-winners, they are steadfast, and they will never again experience the lower states of existence but head for Awakening.

13. In this community, there are monks [and nuns] who practice the fourfold cultivation of awareness, who practice the four right exertions⁶, who practice the four bases of power⁷, who practice the five faculties and five strengths⁸, who practice the seven factors of awakening⁹, who practice the eightfold path of the noble ones¹⁰, who practice love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, who practice with what is unattractive, and who practice with impermanence.

14. In this community, there are also monks [and nuns] who practice awareness with breathing — such practitioners are in this community.

Awareness with Breathing

15. Dear practitioners, awareness with breathing, when cultivated and pursued, bears great fruit and brings great benefit, since it perfects the fourfold cultivation of awareness. Awareness perfects the seven factors of awakening and these bring to perfection true awareness and liberation.

16. How do we practice and cultivate the awareness with breathing?

17. Here, having gone to the forest, to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut, we sit down folding our legs crosswise. Holding our body erect and establishing awareness in front of us¹¹, we mindfully breathe in, and mindfully breathe out.

18. We train thus:

- Breathing in long, we know ‘I breathe in long’. Breathing out long, we know ‘I breathe out long.’
- Breathing in short, we know ‘I breathe in short’. Breathing out short, we know ‘I breathe out short’.
- ‘I breathe in experiencing the entire body. I breathe out experiencing the entire body.’¹²
- ‘I breathe in calming the physical formations. I breathe out calming the physical formations.’¹³

19.¹⁴ We train thus:

- ‘I breathe in experiencing joy. I breathe out experiencing joy.’
- ‘I breathe in experiencing happiness. I breathe out experiencing happiness.’
- ‘I breathe in experiencing the mental formations. I breathe out experiencing the mental formations.’
- ‘I breathe in calming the mental formations. I breathe out calming the mental formations.’¹⁵

20.¹⁶ We train thus:

- ‘I breathe in experiencing the mind. I breathe out experiencing the mind.’¹⁷
- ‘I breathe in delighting the mind. I breathe out delighting the mind.’
- ‘I breathe in steadying the mind. I breathe out steadying the mind.’
- ‘I breathe in liberating the mind. I breathe out liberating the mind.’¹⁸

21. We train thus:

- ‘I breathe in seeing impermanence. I breathe out seeing impermanence.’
- ‘I breathe in seeing the fading away. I breathe out seeing the fading away.’
- ‘I breathe in seeing cessation. I breathe out seeing cessation.’¹⁹
- ‘I breathe in seeing complete release. I breathe out seeing complete release.’²⁰

22. This is how awareness with breathing is cultivated and pursued so that it bears great fruit and brings great benefit.

The Fourfold Cultivation of Awareness

23. How do we practice and cultivate awareness with breathing to bring to perfection the fourfold cultivation of awareness?

24. Whenever, with full discernment, we breathe in or out, long or short, or train in experiencing the entire breathing body or calm the physical formations – then we abide contemplating the body as a body – diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world. This corresponds to cultivating awareness of the *body*, where we consider the in- and outbreath as body [or physical formations].

25. Whenever while breathing in and out we train in experiencing joy or happiness, experiencing the mental formations and calming them – then we abide contemplating sensations as sensations – diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world. This corresponds to cultivating awareness of *sensations* [or mental formations], where we consider the in- and outbreath as sensations [or mental formations].

26. Whenever while breathing in and out we train in experiencing, delighting, steadying or liberating the mind – then we abide contemplating *mind* as mind – diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world.

This awareness we only find, if we are not distracted but alert. That is why we abide contemplating diligently, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world.

27. Whenever while breathing in and out we train in seeing impermanence, fading away, cessation or relinquishment – then we abide contemplating *dhammas* as dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world.

He who sees with wisdom the abandoning of greed and distress watches carefully with equanimity. That is why we abide contemplating diligently, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world.

28. This is how we perfect the fourfold cultivation of awareness by practicing and cultivating the awareness with breathing.

The Seven Factors of Awakening

29. How do we practice and cultivate the fourfold cultivation of awareness to bring to perfection the seven factors of Awakening?

30. Whenever we abide contemplating the body as body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world – then our awareness is steady and uninterrupted. This arouses *awareness* [mindfulness] as a factor for awakening, cultivates it and brings it to perfection.

31. Remaining aware we examine, analyse, and understand that experience with wisdom. This arouses *investigation of dhammas* as a factor for awakening, cultivates it and brings it to perfection.

32. With wisdom we analyse that experience, examine and explore it in depth. This arouses *joyful perseverance* as a factor for awakening, cultivates it and brings it to perfection.

33. If we practice with unflagging joyful perseverance, this arouses heartfelt *joy* as a factor for awakening, cultivates it and brings it to perfection.

34. With joy in the heart, body and mind become calm. This arouses *tranquil ease* as a factor for awakening, cultivates it and brings it to perfection.

35. When body and mind are serenely at ease, the mind becomes concentrated. This arouses *meditative absorption* as a factor for awakening, cultivates it and brings it to perfection.

36. We then carefully watch the absorbed mind with equanimity. This arouses *equanimity* as a factor for awakening, cultivates it and brings it to perfection.

37. This happens in the same way when we abide contemplating sensations as sensations [or mental formations], diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world. Our practice will bring forth awareness, investigation of dhammas, perseverance, joy, tranquil ease, meditative absorption, and equanimity as factors of awakening; it will cultivate them and bring them to perfection.

38. This comes about in the same way when we abide contemplating the mind as mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world. Our practice will bring forth awareness, investigation of dhammas, perseverance, joy, tranquil ease, meditative absorption, and equanimity as factors of awakening; it will cultivate them and bring them to perfection.

39. Moreover, it applies equally when we abide contemplating dhammas as dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful – putting aside desires and discontent concerning the world. Our practice will bring forth awareness, investigation of dhammas, perseverance, joy, tranquil ease, meditative absorption, and equanimity as factors of awakening; it will cultivate them and bring them to perfection.

40. This is how practicing and cultivating the fourfold cultivation of awareness brings to perfection the seven factors of awakening.

True Awareness and Liberation

41. How do we practice and cultivate the seven factors of awakening to bring to perfection true awareness and liberation?

42. The seven factors of awakening – awareness, investigation of dhammas, perseverance, joy, tranquil ease, meditative absorption, and equanimity – are supported by seclusion, by fading away, by cessation. If you practice the seven factors of awakening in seclusion with fading away and cessation, they will result in complete release.

43. Practitioners, this is how practicing and cultivating the seven factors of awakening brings to perfection true awareness and liberation.

That is what the Exalted One said. Deeply inspired, the monks [and nuns] delighted in the words of the Blessed One.

English translation by Lama Tilmann Lhundrup.

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- ¹ The sutra is in full length, but repetitions are shortened. The translation attempts to be easy to recite. It is based on the translations of the Venerables Thanissaro, Buddhadasa, Vimalaramsi, Mettiko (Kay Zumwinkler) and Thich Nhat Hanh.
- ² Elder monks (*thera*) are ordained for more than ten years. Monk (*bhikkhu*) means beggar or someone who sees the danger of circling in existences.
- ³ The final retreat ceremony (*pavarana*) includes the mutual expression of critiques and encouragements.
- ⁴ The three mental effluents (*asava*) are: (1) desire for sensory experiences, (2) desire for existence or non-existence, (3) holding on to lack of awareness (ignorance, views).
- ⁵ According to the Pali texts, arhats are free of ten fetters (*samyojana*). These are 1. *sakkayaditthi*: belief in a permanent self or soul, 2. *vicikiccha*: doubt in the correct path, 3. *silabbataparamasa*: belief that chanting, or rites and rituals lead one to Nibbana, 4. *kanasmaraga*: lust, greed, desire, 5. *patigha*: hatred, aversion, 6. *ruparaga* and *aruparaga*: desire for the realms of form or non-form, 7. *mana*: conceit, arrogance, pride, 8. *middha*: sloth, torpor, dullness of mind, 9. *uddhacca*: restlessness, agitation of mind, 10. *avijja*: ignorance, lack of awareness.
- ⁶ *Four right exertions*: to abandon harmful acts already committed, to not engage in harmful acts not yet committed, to perform wholesome acts not yet accomplished, and to enhance wholesome acts already accomplished.
- ⁷ *Four bases of power*: the absorptions of determined aspiration, joyful perseverance, mental engagement, and analysis.
- ⁸ *Five faculties and strengths*: trust, joyful perseverance, awareness, meditative absorption (*samadhi*), and wisdom.
- ⁹ *Seven factors of awakening*: true awareness, discernment, joyful perseverance, joy, tranquil ease, *samadhi*, equanimity.
- ¹⁰ *Eightfold path*: true view, motivation, speech, conduct, livelihood, aspiration, awareness, and meditation.
- ¹¹ *Parimukham* can mean “around the mouth”, but in the Vinaya (Cv.V.27.4) it means in front of the chest or “in front”.
- ¹² Experiencing the entire body, means to experience the physical body and the breath body (*prana kaya*) in the process of breathing in and out.
- ¹³ The four steps of awareness (mindfulness) with the body are called in Pali: *digham pajanati*, *rassam pajanati*, *sabbakayami-patisamvedi*, and *passambhayam kayasankharam*.
- ¹⁴ The following four verses stand for the four meditative absorptions in the realm of form which are characterized by one-pointedness (*ekagatta*). Passing through the 1st level subtle, nonconceptual analysis (*vitakka*, noting the object; vicara, experiencing the object) is abandoned, passing through the 2nd one lets go of clinging to joy, contentment (*piti*) and the 3rd level of clinging to happiness (*sukha*) to enter with the 4th level into deep, undistracted equanimity (*upekkha*).
- ¹⁵ The four steps of awareness with sensations are called in Pali: *piti-patisamvedi*, *sukha-patisamvedi*, *cittasankhara-patisamvedi*, and *passambhayam cittasankharam*.
- ¹⁶ According to some teachers the next four verses concerning awareness with mind represent the four formless meditative absorptions. After letting go of wanting to dwell in equanimity arises: (1) an experience of limitless space, followed by (2) an experience of limitless consciousness, followed (3) by an experience of nothing-whatsoever, and (4) an experience of neither-perception-nor-no-perception. Only if these states are used to deepen one’s insight they will actually lead to liberation from suffering.
- ¹⁷ The four steps of awareness with mind are called in Pali: *citta-patisamvedi*, *abhippamodayam cittam*, *samadham cittam*, *vimocayam cittam*.
- ¹⁸ Through the stages of meditative absorption the mind is, step by step, temporarily released from burdensome mental states of greater and greater refinement (AN 9.34).
- ¹⁹ It is the seeing or contemplating of the fading away and cessation of all clinging, attachment, and identification, and thus of all roots of suffering and of obliged rebirth.
- ²⁰ The four steps of awareness with dhammas are called in Pali: *anicca-nupassi*, *viraga-nupassi*, *nirodha-nupassi*, and *patinissagga-nupassi*.