

mindfulness of in + out breathing

extract from the **anapanasati sutta**: majjhima nikaya 118

‘In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to the four foundations of mindfulness... the four right exertions... the four bases of success... the five spiritual faculties, the five strengths... the seven factors of awakening... the Noble Eightfold Path: such are the monks in this community.

In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to the to the development of loving kindness... compassion... sympathetic joy... equanimity... the perception of impermanence: such are the monks in this community.

...In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to mindfulness of in and out breathing. Mindfulness of in and out breathing, when developed and pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit. Mindfulness of in and out breathing, when developed and pursued brings the four foundations of mindfulness to their culmination. The four foundations of mindfulness, when developed and pursued, bring the seven factors of awakening to their culmination. The seven factors of awakening, when developed and pursued, perfect clear insight and liberation.

Now how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to bring the four foundations of mindfulness to their culmination?

The meditator, having gone to the forest, to the shade of a tree, or an empty building, sits down with legs folded crosswise, body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, one breathes in; mindful one breathes out.

1 the body group

1.1

While breathing in long, one knows: ‘I am breathing in long’;
while breathing out long, one knows: ‘I am breathing out long’.

1.2

While breathing in short, one knows: ‘I am breathing in short’;
while breathing out short, one knows: ‘I am breathing out short.’

1.3

One trains oneself:
Sensitive to the whole body, I breathe in.
Sensitive to the whole body, I breathe out.

1.4

Calming the whole body, I breathe in.
Calming the whole body, I breathe out.

2 the feelings group

2.1

One trains oneself:

'Sensitive to rapture, I breathe in';

'Sensitive to rapture, I breathe out'.

2.2

'Sensitive to bliss, I breathe in';

'Sensitive to bliss, I breathe out'.

2.3

'Sensitive to mental processes, I breathe in';

'Sensitive to mental processes, I breathe out'.

2.4

'Calming mental processes, I breathe in';

'Calming mental processes, I breathe out'.

3 the mind group

3.1

One trains oneself:

'Sensitive to the mind, I breathe in';

'Sensitive to the mind, I breathe out'.

3.2

'Gladdening the mind, I breathe in';

'Gladdening the mind, I breathe out'.

3.3

'Steadying the mind, I breathe in';

'Steadying the mind, I breathe out'.

3.4

'Liberating the mind, I breathe in';

'Liberating the mind, I breathe out'.

4 the wisdom group

4.1

One trains oneself:

'Focusing on impermanence, I breathe in';

'Focusing on impermanence, I breathe out'.

4.2

'Focusing on fading away, I breathe in';

'Focusing on fading away, I breathe out'.

4.3

'Focusing on cessation, I breathe in';

'Focusing on cessation, I breathe out'.

4.4

'Focusing on relinquishment, I breathe in';

'Focusing on relinquishment, I breathe out'.

anapanasati sutta: contemplations i, ii

the breath

1.1

*While breathing in long, one knows: 'I am breathing in long';
while breathing out long, one knows: 'I am breathing out long'.*

1.2

*While breathing in short, one knows: 'I am breathing in short';
while breathing out short, one knows: 'I am breathing out short.'*



In the first two contemplations of the anapanasati sutta we are training the mind to: Connect with the breath, experience the breath, and stay engaged with the experience. Precise, relaxed attention and a quality of appreciative awareness. There are three aspects of breathing it can be helpful to turn our attention to: Location, duration, quality

i

Location

Where is the sensation of the breath most distinct?

This may change over the period of meditation: move your attention in response

Following the in-breath and out-breath.

Follow the in-breath from nostril, to chest, to abdomen

Follow the out-breath from abdomen, to chest, to nostril

If this gets tiring when you get more concentrated, switch to *resting*.

Resting attention on a specific point and leaving it there especially beneficial for establishing the one-pointedness *ekaggata*

ii

Duration: long and short breaths

Can differ from sit to sit, from person to person

Don't worry about getting the 'right answer'

Sensing the duration

Sensing the relative length or shortness of each breath intuitively without counting

Does the breath feel long or short?

What the duration of this breath feel like relative to the previous breaths?

Staying connected to beginning, middle and end of the breath.

Start with half breaths:

Stay connected to the beginning, middle and the end of the in breath;
then the beginning, middle and the end of the out breath

Quality

Again, just notice, what is happening?
 What is the quality, the texture, of this breath?
 Noticing, is the breath:
 smooth/rough, easy/forced, deep/shallow, slow/fast?

Not *thinking* about the breathing, but *feeling* it, connecting to the direct experience of it.
 It might be enough to **feel** the character of the breath without giving it a name.
 At other times, a **simple label** might make the experience clearer.
 You can use the words in the list above, or others that describe the breath.
Focus on the experience rather than finding the correct word
 Don't make the noting a complication.

Notice how the three aspects of the breath **affect each other**

When there's a long breath:
 Where in the body do you feel it?
 What's its quality?

When there's a short breath:
 Where in the body do you feel it?
 What's its quality?

Keeping the connection

The breath can become **subtler** the more you become absorbed in it
 If we notice this, and stay connected, the attention becomes subtler and subtler.
 You can lose the breath in this transition.
 Be responsive, and adjust your attention accordingly.
 If you lose the breath entirely, start over.
 Find where the breath is and connect with location, duration, quality.
 The same is true when you become aware that you have become distracted.
 Simply start over with patience and kindness.

Take the process as the path

counting

If it is helpful, use the **counting** to keep the attention connected to the breath.
 Dhammaloka, drawing on Ledi Sayadaw:
 'Count only those breaths that you have perceived clearly and with mindfulness.
 If any of them wasn't clearly perceived, simply repeat the previous number.
 If you've lost the count, go back to one.
 The essential thing [when using counting] is to make the perception clear and the attention strong and firm'.

anapanasati sutta: contemplations iii, iv

the body

Even this early in the practice, as we begin to perceive certain truths – that attention deepens the breathing, deep breathing relaxes the body – a faith develops that wasn't there before. Larry Rosenberg

iii

Sensitive to the whole body...

Keep a gentle sense of connection to the whole body.

Awareness opening up to the whole body, breath no longer the exclusive object of focus. The breath still there to help us concentrate, and part of overall experience of the body.

Awareness of the body helps to stop us taking a too conceptual approach to the practice, to focus on actual experience

iv

Calming the whole body...

Arising as the natural fruit of the third contemplation

Our awareness of the body calms (allowing it to be as it is without reacting)

The experience of the body itself calms and is less distracting

Calming by Control:

the breath is the conditioner of the body (*kayasankhara*)

Causing the body to calm through the breath calming

done through building our attention on the breath

Make the effort to keep your attention with the breath moment by moment,

Calming by Release:

Sensitive to the whole body

Letting the body be as it is in each moment

Experiencing it with curiosity, kindness, precision, appreciation

If there's some aspect of the body we resist being sensitive to we gently soften around that experience and ease into it

The inter-relationship of breath and body and mind

Noticing to the inter-relationship of breath, body and mind.

very act of being aware tends to calm the breath and body

Calming the breath and body has the fruit of calming the mind

This principle built on later in sutta

The body tetrad provides a *samatha* basis from which subtler stages grow

anapanasati sutta: contemplations v, vi

feelings 1: *pitti* + *sukha*

*‘There is a quality to awareness which feels good and positive in itself.
It conveys a sense of realness and aliveness that is enough somehow.’* Rigdzin Shikpo

*‘There will be a degree of *piti* and *sukha* proportionate to the extent of calming.
Thus even those practitioners who are unable to bring about *jhana* can still manage
enough *piti* and *sukha* to practice these steps.’* Buddhadasa Bhikkhu.

1st tetrad encourages connected and sustained awareness of the breath (*vitakka* + *vicara*),
and a sense of ease and well-being in the breath, body and mind.
Now, the second tetrad begins by focusing on the two ‘warm’ *jhana* factors of *piti* and
sukha, to the extent that they are present in the practice.

v

‘Sensitive to *piti* I breathe in; sensitive to *piti* I breathe out’.

noticing what’s there

Practice by noticing the pleasurable elements in our experience of breath and body,
making them the focus of our attention, connected to breath in the background.
If no *piti*, go back to mindfulness of breath and body.

Piti is a feeling of delight, pleasure, energy freely moving in the body, mind and emotions.
It arises when we start to free restricted or blocked energy

vi

‘Sensitive to *sukha* I breathe in; sensitive to *sukha* I breathe out’.

Sangharakshita describes *sukha* as, ‘the apparently causeless feeling of intense happiness
which wells up from the depths of one’s being when the physical innervations associated
with *piti* have subsided...’

As we bring more awareness to it, as with the breath, *piti* will tend to quieten,
becoming bliss or *sukha* through a process called *passaddhi*,
likened to the sound of a gong fading.
Passaddhi is tension release, tranquility, serenity and it absorbs the energy of *piti*

Bliss or contentment (Pali, *sukha*) , literally, “easy to bear”
Tranquil, soothing pleasant vedana

anapanasati sutta: contemplations vii, viii

feelings 2

The Pali term vedana refers to feeling not in the sense of the emotions, but in terms of sensation. Vedana is whatever pleasantness or unpleasantness we might experience in our contact with any physical or mental stimulus.

To understand what we would call emotion, Buddhism looks at the way in which that pleasant or painful feeling is interwoven with our reactions and responses to it. In Buddhist psychology, vedana is said to combine with sankhara, a volitional quality involving a tendency towards action. It is this combination of sensation with volition that approaches what we would recognize as fully developed emotion.

Sangharakshita

vii

‘Sensitive to mental processes, I breathe in / out’

The word translated by Rosenberg as ‘mental processes’ is *cittasankhara*, translated by Buddhadasa as ‘mind conditioner’. This points to how our pleasant and unpleasant feelings tend to shape our mental states. This is one of the most significant points in Buddhist psychology, where we can choose to move from craving to liberation.

viii

‘Calming mental processes, I breathe in / out’

This is the same process at the level of feelings that we saw in the body in the fourth contemplation. We don’t force feelings to calm, it’s the natural consequence of the awareness we bring to them.

In a way, not the feeling, but our response to it calms:

the open awareness instead of the disturbance of craving or aversion.

Working with *cittasankhara*

Make everything as simple as possible, but not simpler. Einstein

Generally, keep the meditation as simple as possible. In the previous contemplations, we noticed the specific pleasant vedanas of piti and sukha, and noticed their effect on our awareness. If our meditation is deepening, then stay with the breath, with piti and sukka, letting our engagement with them deepen.

However, sometimes a feeling is compelling enough to make it difficult to stay with that simple experience, and in that case we can include the feeling in our attention.

1 noticing

This is simply noticing that a feeling is present that is catching our awareness and energy, and turning our attention to include it.

Turn towards any feelings with with awareness and openness.

Sometimes it is enough to ‘touch and let go’: it’s enough to simply notice and come back to the breath.

2 connecting

All feelings, when felt, are blissful. Prakasha

Sometimes we need to give feelings more attention.

This means bringing to the feeling the same open, connected awareness that we previously brought to the breath and the body.

We're connecting to something alive, intimate. Awareness needs to be kind. There's a strong flavour of metta in this stage of the practice.

The kind awareness is itself transformative, feelings become more open, fluid.

3 calming

In particular, notice the feelings in the body. Notice any physical sense of tightness, tension, resistance. Breath in to that and let it soften, let the body contain the feeling.

Notice any tendency to in the mind to 'contract' around these feelings

Any tendency to cling, to push away.

Bringing the same open, kind, even 'accepting' awareness:

To pleasant feelings, without wanting to hold onto them

To unpleasant feelings, without wanting to resist them

To neutral feelings, without wanting to distract ourselves

Looking for a quality of openness, clarity, connection: the mind like a clear blue sky.

anapanasati sutta: contemplations ix, x, xi, xii

the mind

'We are learning to observe these states in a friendly way, instead of identifying with them, resisting them, or rejecting them. The point is to change our mind from a battlefield, where we're always fighting these states, or getting lost in them, to a place of peaceful co-existence.'

Larry Rosenberg

Desire is the sense of possessing something of great value which produces well being. We feel that we need to reach out in order to possess it. When we see that the quality of well-being is actually a quality of our own intrinsic being, desire becomes the quality of sensitivity, responsiveness, compassion.

Hatred is the quality of striking out to remove obstacles. It is limited by the confused perception of self and other. When those limitations are removed, the essence of that hating energy is not hatred, but the Buddha quality that sees the non-existence of any kind of obstruction. Rigdzin Shikpo

"Instead of applying specific antidotes to all the toxins in the mind, one simply tries to stop polluting one's mind-stream with grasping onto afflictive thoughts and emotions."

Alan Wallace

ix

'Sensitive to the mind, I breathe in' / out

citannanupassana

Bringing attention directly to the mind.

Traditionally asked to be aware of a number of qualities:

Notice the mind when craving is there and when it is absent

Notice the mind when aversion is there and when it is absent

Notice the mind when confusion is there and when it is absent

Notice any tendency in the mind of wanting, to pull in, to hold

Any tendency to resist, to push away

Any tendency of the mind to wander, to move in circles

Are the hindrances present?

Is the mind concentrated or not?

Is it attached or liberated?

Stable? Responsive?

Cf the Satipatthana sutta for a fuller list

x

‘Gladdening the mind, I breathe in / out’;

We touch and recognise what is not wrong in our consciousness; our capacity for being joyful and mindful. Thich Nhat Hanh

a samatha aspect and a more reflective one

noticing the effect on the mind of the experience of piti and sukha

Noticing the qualities of awareness, calm, joy that we’ve built up already in the practice. attention strengthens the experience.

Recognising our own capacity for clarity and connection, to the degree that it is present

When the mind is more concentrated, noticing a tendency towards dullness, sinking.

Intensifying the awareness and direct connection to the breath.

xi

‘Steadying the mind...’

This is the art of taking care of negative formations, embracing them mindfully.

Thich Nhat Hanh.

Aware of any tendency to want, to push away.

Noticing the concentration that is already in place. Attention deepening that.

When the mind is more concentrated, noticing a subtle tendency towards excitement,

drifting: excited by the experience or a little anxious about it. Relaxing and letting go.

xii

‘Liberating the mind...’

No longer so determined by craving and aversion, a deepening sense of wellbeing, and a more stable concentration.

Growing sense of mind free, not attached, not caught in experience.

anapanasati sutta: contemplations xiii, xiv, xv, xvi

wisdom

*If you don't believe
Look at September, look at October:
The falling leaves cover the ground
And fill the rivers*

xiii

'Focusing on impermanence, I breathe in / out'.

Annicanupassana

Annica, of course, is impermanence. *Annicanupassana* means to focus on, reflect on impermanence.

It's not a reflection about impermanence, but a direct attention to the unfolding flow of experience, that grows directly out of the open awareness of the previous stages.

We practice by taking attention to the previous contemplations, this time noticing particularly the impermanence of each of them, aware of the arising, the changing sensations, and the ceasing of each one.

xiv

'Focusing on disentanglement...'

Viraganupassana, *vi* not, *raga* attachment

Describing the opposite of passionate attachment.

Perhaps the most evocative translation of *viraga* is disentanglement,

We start to see how we've been caught in experience, how we've identified with it and, the key instruction here, we let it go.

It's not mine, it's not me

xv

'Focusing on cessation...'

Nirodhanupassana.

Nirodha, cessation, in context of four noble truths, synonymous with nirvana.

The culmination of the previous contemplation.

Cessation of attachment. The ending of *dukkha*.

xvi

'Focusing on relinquishment...'

Patinissaganupassana, literally 'contemplating giving up, giving back'

'It's not me; it's not mine. I let it go, give it back'

from The six element practice

anapanasati sutta: **the short form**

'Try to be mindful, and let things take their natural course. Then your mind will become still in any surroundings, like a clear forest pool. All kinds of wonderful, rare animals will come to drink at the pool, and you will clearly see the nature of all things. You will see many strange and wonderful things come and go, but you will be still'. Ajahn Chah

1

connecting with the breath

aware of the breath until a certain level of concentration and calm

2

open the awareness to whatever arises

things in experience calling your attention,
give same full open awareness as gave breath.

don't go looking for them, but if something strong is there, present to it.

3

notice the impermanent nature of what we're aware of

and let it go



The four remainings

remain with the body like a mountain

remain with the heart open like a child gazing with wonder out across an ocean

remain with a mind like a clear blue sky

remain with the senses like a mirror

You might find this a useful brief preparation, as a way to connect with the four satipatthanas

further reading

Anapanasati sutta

Breath by Breath, Larry Rosenberg, Shambala

Mindfulness with Breathing, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Wisdom

Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond, Ajahn Brahm, Wisdom

The Path of Emancipation, Thich Nhat Hanh, Full Circle

Anapanasati Sutta, Viveka, talks on FreeBuddhistAudio

Satipatthana sutta

Satipatthana, Analayo, Windhorse

Living with Awareness. Sangharakshita, Windhorse