

Mindfulness of in- and out-breath – *ānāpānasati*

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The contemplation of the breath is the most widely practised *samatha* meditation and also the most widely practised type of meditation at all. It is also frequently found in the early Buddhist scriptures, but not as the only *samatha* meditation subject.

Mindfulness of in- and out-breath refers to the mindfulness that has the inbreath and the outbreath as the object of meditation.

Mindfulness of the breath is a suitable meditation to calm the agitated mind. It is peaceful from the beginning and can be practised satisfactorily by many different character types. Peaceful here refers both to the state of mind to be achieved and to the object of the breath. It can also be practised in many situations, not just in formal sitting meditation, because the breath is always with oneself. Many people prefer it as the only *samatha* object. It has a calming, harmonizing effect on the mind from the very beginning, even before a counterpart sign (*nimitta*) arises.

It leads to physical well-being, all bodily functions are calmed and harmonized. It is therefore a suitable object when switching from other activities to meditation. One can practise mindfulness of the breath until the mind has calmed down and then one can move on to another meditation subject.

Also when practicing *vipassanā* meditation without *jhāna* concentration, it can be used at the level of contemplating the breath without counterpart sign (*nimitta*) as a suitable method of concentration.

The Buddha himself practised mindfulness of in-breath and out-breath as the basis for *vipassanā* and thus attained awakening.

Breath observation has positive effects on the body and mind at every stage of the *ānāpānasati* practise, even at the very beginning.

The Breath in General

The breath is always there, from birth to death. As long as there is consciousness we breathe, also in our sleep. We don't have to do anything to breathe. We are not conscious of breathing most of the time, but it happens anyway. It sustains our life. That is why breath is universal and essential for life. Everyone breathes, the breath is something that connects us.

A constant exchange between inside and outside takes place through the breath. We cannot prevent this process. We all breathe the same air and are therefore connected. The exhaled breath mixes with the air in the room and becomes the inhaled breath. The breath not only remains in the lungs, but the oxygen goes from there into the blood and is distributed throughout the entire body. At rest, 7.5 liters of air are inhaled and exhaled every minute.

The breath is influenced both by physical activity and by the state of mind. The mind produces the breathing movement.

For example, when one is excited, one says: 'breathtaking view' or 'fear took my breath away'. The breath is therefore an expression of the physical and mental state: anger produces a different breath than a loving attitude, fear a different breath than trust, mental unrest a different breath than calm and stillness. The breath is also different depending on whether wholesome thoughts or

unwholesome thoughts arise. Unwholesome thoughts are coarse and therefore the breath also becomes coarse.

Many psychosomatic diseases have something to do with breathing difficulties. They can cause heavy breathing, hyperventilation or shortness of breath. Heart activity and breathing also influence each other.

Waste products are exhaled through breathing. The breathing process therefore has a cleansing function for the body. At the same time, breathing supplies the body with vital oxygen. Air has a different composition: the composition of the elements in the air varies. If there are a lot of people in a room, the air quality becomes poor and there is a need to let fresh air enter. In this case, the air becomes heavier as the earth element increases.

Special Characteristics of the Breath

Breathing is an involuntary bodily function. However, unlike other involuntary bodily functions, we can influence it voluntarily.

In *ānāpānasati* meditation the breath takes the function of making conscious a bodily function that otherwise takes place unconsciously. Through conscious, pure observation, the breath is calmed and thus also the mind as a prerequisite for mental calmness (*samādhi*). Observation creates the physical conditions for deep mental calm and at the same time for concentration.

When the mind is in a subtle state, the breath also becomes subtle. When the breath is very subtle, the mind can understand very subtle things and thus develop wisdom.

If one observes the breath continuously for a long time, a subtle feeling of happiness develops, which is more satisfying than the feeling caused by sense objects. The mind becomes peaceful. Although it is such a simple observation, it becomes fulfilling.

It is a practical meditation object: one has the breath with oneself everywhere, in retreat and at home. It does not cost anything, not even electricity, because one can practise in the dark. One can practise while sitting, standing, lying down or walking.

One has an island to which one can always withdraw to calm down, clear one's mind or recharge one's batteries.

Benefits of *ānāpānasati*

SN 54.9 In Vesālī – Vesālīsuttam

"Bhikkhus, this concentration by mindfulness of breathing, when developed and frequently practised, is peaceful and sublime (santo c'eva paṇīto ca), a spotless pleasant dwelling, and it disperses and quells right on the spot evil unwholesome states whenever they arise."

'Developed' means that one makes them grow, i.e. one develops them by going through all the difficulties.

'Frequently practised' means that one practises again and again, regularly and thoroughly. It is 'peaceful and sublime' with the advantage that one never is tired of it. The peacefulness of this exercise does not only occur in the access concentration, but from the very beginning. The mind observes a physical object and calms it through non-judgmental observation. As a result, the body becomes calm and the mind peaceful.

'Sublime' means that one can quickly surpass deluded thinking with this method.

'Spotless' means that the contemplation of the breath is free from unwholesome states of mind when practised correctly.

In the same sutta, the Buddha gives the following comparison:

"Just as, bhikkhus, in the last month of the hot season, when a mass of dust and dirt has swirled up, a great rain cloud out-of season disperses it and quells it on the spot, so too concentration by mindfulness of breathing, when developed and frequently practised, is peaceful and sublime, an spotless pleasant dwelling, and it disperses and quells on the spot evil unwholesome states whenever they arise."

Mindfulness of the in-breath and out-breath not only has a calming effect on the mind from the outset, but also brings about tranquillity from defilements through a deep purification of defilements. When one practises *vipassanā* based on mindfulness of the in-and out-breath and thus attains path consciousness, the defilements are finally calmed so that they can never arise again.

Presentation in DN 22 The Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness – Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasuttaṃ

The Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta is one of the most important discourses on the practise of the Buddhist path of insight.

The development of mindfulness of the breath (*ānāpānasati*) was taught there by the Buddha beside other exercises. He said in the chapter on contemplation of the body in the first section on in-breath and out-breath:

"And how, bhikkhus, does a bhikkhu abide contemplating the body as a body?"

This is therefore a way of observing the body. The breath belongs to the body.

- Location:

*"Here a bhikkhu,
gone to the forest or
to the root of a tree or
to an empty hut, sits down; ..."*

This means one should practise in a place free from distractions. For formal meditation to attain *jhānā*, one should practise in a quiet place. This place should be free from external disturbances and, like 'an empty hut', offer little distraction to the mind, be it from objects that catch the eye, be it from busy and restless people or be it from noises. Noises are a disturbance for the first *jhāna*. Especially voices, music, continuous noises from machines etc. are very disturbing for the development of concentration.

AN 10.72 Thorn – Kaṇṭakasuttaṃ

"Good, good, bhikkhus! Those great disciples spoke rightly when they said that I have called noise a thorn to the jhānas. ... Noise is a thorn to the first jhāna."

- Body posture and place of observation:

*"... he (she) sits down with his legs crossed and
his body erect and fixes mindfulness around the mouth (parimukhaṃ¹ satim
upaṭṭhapetvā) ."*

- Description of the method in four practical steps:

1. *"... with mindfulness he/she breathes in, with mindfulness he/she breathes out.*
2. *if the in-breath is long, he/she understands: 'I breathe in long'
or if the out-breath is long, he/she understands: 'I breathe out long'.
If the in-breath is short, he/she understands: 'I breathe in short',*

¹ *Parimukhaṃ* - *pari* means around something, *mukhaṃ* means mouth or in general body opening.

or if the out-breath is short, he/she understands: 'I breathe out short'."

One should not think about or evaluate what the breathe is like, and one should not wait to see what the next one is like. One should simply register and never miss a breath.

3. "... so he/she practises: 'Experiencing the whole (breath) body, I will breathe in.'
Thus he/she practises: 'Experiencing the whole (breath) body, I will breathe out.'²

This means that the mind should be fully focused on the breath all the time, without interruption, the mind should not slacken. In other words, one should overcome inertia.

4. "So he/she practises: 'I will breathe in, calming the body'.
This is how he/she practises: 'I will breathe out, calming the body'."

Body Posture while Sitting

One can start a meditation period by relaxing the body. You could use the following method:

Adopt an upright posture.

Keep the body upright and straight,
the pelvis down onto the cushion or mat.

This should be a natural posture,
the head rests straight on the spine,
it does not sink forward.

Then you can feel into the top point of the head and the point in middle between the ischial tuberosities.

Then you connect these two points and relax internally.

The body remains upright, does not slump and does not go limp.

The spine always remains straight and the individual vertebrae should rest on top of each other like stacked coins. The head rests straight on the cervical spine and is pulled upwards at the crown of the head as if with a thread. The chin is brought slightly towards the Adam's apple, allowing the exhalation to flow freely.

The diaphragm is pushed forward a little. The chest and heart should feel open. Sit on the ischial tuberosities so that the pelvis is straight. If the spine remains straight, there will be no pain in the pelvis or legs falling asleep when sitting for long periods. The spine should be straight but not tense. This straightening should not be associated with effort. However, you should not sit as if you have swallowed a stick, as this requires too much attention and the breath cannot flow unrestricted and cannot calm down. It is possible that the back will slump slightly with increasing concentration. The muscles will relax. One should then not pay too much attention to straightening up, as this disturbs the concentration on the breath or the sign of concentration (*nimitta*).

If one can sit with legs crossed, this is a very stable posture for concentrating for a longer time. If this is not possible, then one can also practise on a chair at the beginning. For the following exercises, it is useful to try sitting on the floor with legs crossed with increasing time. One should extend the time for each session so that the muscles and tendons become accustomed to the stretching. It is easier to develop deep concentration for a longer period of time on the floor with crossed legs because the pelvis is more open in this posture than on a chair.

If one sits on the floor, the legs should be crossed or one can sit on the lower legs with the lower legs folded back. With the legs crossed, it is easier for the internal winds to rise and fall unhindered. The nervous system is not blocked by the upright posture of the spine and the

2 *Sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī it is said in DN 22. As the Buddha before has advised to observe the breath around the mouth or nose, kāya here has to be understood literally as 'group'. In this case the group of in- and out-breath is meant. One should observe these without break.*

crossed legs. The lower legs can be placed in front without being crossed or crossed so that one foot rests on the opposite thigh. The pelvis must not fall backwards, otherwise this can lead to a blockage in the ileosacral joints. One can sit on a cushion or on a bench. If sitting on the floor is too difficult, one can sit on a chair. However, one should not lean against the back of the chair. One may experience pain when sitting for long periods of time. If the pain is not caused by a known disease, such as a slipped disc, one should not change posture too quickly, but try to stay with the breath. If the pain becomes unbearable and it is no longer possible to stay with the breath, one can either look at the pain according to the four elements or change posture. Pain that only occurs during meditation is a blockage that is released through concentration. Only then can the concentration go deeper. One should endeavor to extend the time of sitting periods in which one does not change the posture of one's body and get to the point where one can sit for at least an hour without changing posture. It is particularly useful to practise sitting for ever longer periods at home before a retreat.

The hands are placed in the lap, the right hand rests on the left. The tips of the thumbs can touch each other.

The face and mouth are relaxed; the eyes are gently closed. If it is difficult to keep the eyes closed at first, one can keep them slightly open and look down without straining the neck. The eyes should be kept still and not move.

Place of Observation

One should observe the inhalation and exhalation in the mouth-nose area (*parimukhaṃ*), where the air flows in and out of the body. One should start observing the breath where it is most obvious. This can be around the nostrils, on the upper lip or in the area between nose and mouth. Attention should be focused on a symmetrical area or a central point, as prolonged one-sided observation does not allow concentration to go deeper and can also cause discomfort in the body. One should not just observe the breath at one nostril.

A favorable point is the center of the hollow between the nose and mouth. By focusing the attention there, one not only observes the air flowing in and out, but the winds in the body are also calmed and harmonized and guided into the right channels.

Mindfulness is invariably focused on the point of contact with the breath. The breath is seen as a concept. It can therefore only be observed where the air enters and leaves the body. All movements in the body that are triggered by the breath are not the object of this *samatha* meditation. When one observes movements in the body, whether of the abdominal wall or the chest, one is observing movement as a characteristic of the air element and not the breath itself. It is then part of the four-elements-meditation and not mindfulness of the in- and outbreath. One should be aware of this difference, especially if one wants to achieve the mental absorptions (*jhānā*), because one cannot achieve them with four-elements-meditation.

Sometimes the breath becomes so gentle that you don't know whether you are breathing or not. One should then stay at that point and not try to force the breath. This would disturb the concentration and make the mind restless. Also, from *jhāna* to *jhāna* the breath becomes calmer and calmer until in the fourth *jhāna* one can no longer feel the movement of the breath at all. In Visuddhi Magga, the comparison is made with a gong: First one hears the loud sound, then the tones become quieter and quieter. The more attentively one listens, the softer the sounds become, until one only hears the vibration or movement. If one's mind wanders, one only hears the loud sounds. It is the same with the breath, at first one only perceives the coarse breath and then the increasingly subtle breath. This sharpens attention and mindfulness and one-pointedness develops. This is a useful skill for *vipassanā*.

In order to be successful with mindfulness of the in- and outbreath in terms of full concentration, one should avoid rough body movements. To help calm the breath and mind, one should therefore avoid fast running and physical training during an intensive practise period. Calm, slow movements promote the process of calming the body and deepening concentration.

One should only observe the breath at one small, circumscribed point. One should not follow the breath, neither inwards in the body nor outwards. One should also ignore other bodily sensations. It is only about achieving concentration observing this one spot. If one follows the breath and pays attention to all sensations, one cannot achieve *jhānā*.

The Visuddhi Magga gives the example of a gatekeeper. He also stays in one place and observes from there who enters and leaves. If he were to run after people, he would miss people entering or leaving. Another example is given in Visuddhi Magga of someone sawing through a tree trunk. The focus is also only on the one point where the saw teeth touch the wood. The eye does not follow the movement of the saw, because in that case it would not be possible to cut straight through.

You should try to connect the mind with the breathing process. This is done through continuous attention at the one point. The mind must remain focused (*ekaggatā*) and close (*vitakka*) to one point and observe only the breath.

With breath observation, one observes an essential part of life, but one doesn't go with it. The mind rests at one point and this is difficult at first because we are used to jump here and there very quickly with the mind. If the mind follows the movement of the breath, it becomes restless and mental absorption is not possible. It is therefore necessary to apply mental energy to stay in one place. This type of practise also avoids the obstacles and other wandering thoughts because they can no longer interfere.

Mental Preparation

One should stop all thoughts, wishes, plans and worries and not get involved in them. One can contemplate the fact that everything is unstable anyway and that things will be different from what one plans and imagines.

One should also make a firm decision not to take any objects with the mind other than the desired object of the breath for a certain period of time.

So one should sit relaxed and awake and focus one's attention on the breath, and only on the one spot where the inhalation and exhalation touch the skin.

How to Observe

Then one should observe the breath as it comes and goes. It should be the natural breath, one should never try to influence it. If one tries to manipulate it, one will soon become exhausted and unable to concentrate. The purification of body and mind takes place through pure observation and not by making the breath. It is not a breathing exercise as practised in yoga or in other spiritual schools, such as in Tibetan Buddhism or in some breathing therapies where the breath is consciously influenced. Here we only observe and thereby regulate the breath. In the beginning this is more difficult than one can imagine because we are used to intervening, to doing something the way we imagine it. If one tries to breathe more deeply, the breath also becomes very loud, which can be disturbing when one is meditating in a group because one then influences the rhythm of others with one's own loud rhythm. Not controlling and not doing or manipulating anything is also a good exercise in letting go.

One should therefore observe the breath as it is and not evaluate or change it. If it is not clear, one should continue to focus on the chosen point without judging it.

The more subtle the breath, the better the concentration. With other objects, it is the other way round: the more one concentrates, the clearer the object becomes.

In the case of *samatha* meditation, one should not pay attention to the characteristics of the breath, whether it is cold or warm, soft or hard, etc. One should only feel the touch on the skin. The practise of *Samatha* meditation is not about exploring the breath or the body. It is only about attaining calmness and concentration. You should therefore only focus your awareness on the existence of the breath as such. It is the anchor for the mind so that it does not wander.

In some instructions on mindfulness of the breath, for example in the Visuddhi Magga, we find counting as a method to improve concentration at the beginning. This method is not found in the early Buddhist writings. The brain is active for counting. If you count the breaths, the mind constantly changes the object: counting - breath - counting - breath ... It can happen that the attention on counting becomes stronger than the observation of the breath. However, attention to counting cannot achieve *samādhi*, a state of calm and concentration. With counting it is not possible to reach a state in which consciousness arises only in the heart, which is important for deeper concentration. This is why counting is not recommended here. If the breath is too subtle to be observed continuously, meditation can begin with a coarser object, such as observing the sensations of the body according to the four elements.

Thoughts

When thoughts arise, ignore them and return to the breath. You should not judge yourself when thoughts arise. It is normal for our mind to jump from one object to another in the beginning or when we are not meditating frequently. It is normal for thoughts to arise continuously in the mind, one should learn more and more to focus them on this one object and not get entangled in them. If it is not possible to return quickly to the breath, one can make the thoughts the object of observation. Most thoughts should be categorized according to the obstacles. One should find out the main topic and name it with the corresponding obstacle.

Practicing in all Postures

Although the Buddha explains that one should practise these exercises in a secluded place, sitting with legs crossed, it is advisable for the success of meditation to observe this object as often as possible in any posture, in any place. The breath as an object has the particular advantage that we always have it with us. Especially in retreat, one should also take up this object for observation during all kinds of walking, before falling asleep when lying down and also immediately after waking up. In all other activities, if they are not too rough and dominant, one should also observe the breath.

Development of *ānāpānasati*

First one should observe so that one can distinguish between inhalation and exhalation. When one can concentrate one's mind on the breath for at least half an hour and can clearly distinguish between inhalation and exhalation, one should proceed to the second stage:

2. *"If the in-breath is long, he/she understands: 'I breathe in long',
or if the out-breath is long, he/she understands: 'I breathe out long'.
If the in-breath is short, he/she understands: 'I breathe in short',
or if the out-breath is short, he/she understands: 'I breathe out short'."*

At this stage, one should develop the awareness of whether the breath is long or short. Length or shortness refers to the length of time. It is the duration of the in-breath and out-breath. One should decide for oneself which length is long and which is short. There is no standard measure. The measure is based on individual perception. You should be aware of the length of each breath. One will notice that sometimes the breath is long and sometimes it is short. Knowing this is all you need to do at this stage. The length of the in-breath and out-breath changes. You should not worry about this. You should also observe the length of the breaks between inhalation and exhalation and between exhalation and inhalation. One should not deliberately make one's breath long or short. There are different types of people, some people's breath is always shorter, some people's breath is always longer. The length also depends on physical and mental activities. Sometimes the

breath is very long and fine. In this case, it is important for concentration to wait until the next inhalation or exhalation comes without deliberately inducing it.

The Buddha instructs the next step:

3. *"He/she practises like this: 'Experiencing the whole (breath) body, I will breathe in.' Thus he/she practises: 'Experiencing the whole (breath) body, I will breathe out.'"*

At this stage, the entire breath, from beginning to middle to end, should be clearly recognized and one should be fully conscious of it. The mind should have been trained by the previous exercises to be continuously aware of the breath from beginning to end.

Some people can only clearly perceive the beginning of the breath body, not the middle and end; and some can only clearly perceive the middle, not the beginning and end. Still others can only see the end clearly and not the beginning and middle. Some can clearly perceive the whole breath body from the beginning and grasp this whole breath body without digressing. You should strive for the latter, which is why this instruction is given. Because only if you can perceive the breath body from the beginning to the end and then the next beginning and so on, one can develop full concentration with the breath. Beginning, middle and end always refer only to the one observation point at the nostrils or upper lip.

4. *"He/she practises: 'I will breathe in, calming the body.' This is how he/she practises: 'I will breathe out, calming the body'."*

Through continuous mindfulness of the breath, the breath calms down. Thoughts and the mind jumping back and forth from one object to another make the breath rough and restless.

Before observing the breath for a long time, the breath and bodily functions were coarse due to physical and mental activities. Now, as the mind and body become calmer through concentration on the breath, the breath and bodily functions become finer, calmer, milder, gentler. At some point the breathing becomes so fine that it becomes difficult to perceive. It is the same with bodily functions. It takes practise to perceive the fine breath despite its subtlety. One has to be mindful, but without too much effort, in order to perceive this subtle breath. With increasing practise and concentration one will succeed. The calming of the body cannot be produced deliberately. It happens through continuous observation of the breath.

Calming the body also means practising until the fourth *jhāna*, because then the breath stops. Each *jhāna* is calmer than the previous one, both in terms of breath and bodily functions.

So it is said in: AN 10.72 Thorns – Kaṇṭakasuttaṃ

"... For the fourth jhāna, inbreath and outbreath is a thorn. ..."

Just before the sign (*nimitta*) appears, many meditators experience difficulties. They usually experience that the breath becomes very subtle and is no longer clear to the observing mind. When this happens, one should bring one's attention to the place where one was last able to perceive the breath and wait there.

If one practises like this, the obstacles are increasingly suppressed, but not repressed. The thoughts calm down. One gets a light, relaxed feeling of the body. When the breath becomes very subtle and the mind calms down, it may even be that the head, nose and body are no longer really perceived. There is only the breath and the mind, which is aware of the breath. At that time, no observer, no ego, can be found.

It may be that now, when the bodily formations and thus also the breath are calmed, the *nimitta* arises as a sign of concentration. An image of the breath arises in the mind. This can be of different kinds at the beginning. However, no attention should be paid to it at this stage. It can be a soft object or a hard one. The appearance of the object depends on the perception.

The mind combines the way it perceives the breath and the point of contact with what it adds to it, that is, with imaginations. If you perceive the breath as cold and concentrate on it, you may see a cool blue cloud or an icicle. If you perceive the breath as warm and pleasant, you may see a red or orange light. If you perceive the breath as hot or burning, you may see a flame. If you associate the breath with other pleasant objects, you may see a rose or a lotus flower. If you see the breath as hard and turning, you may see a cartwheel or a hard bolt, etc. No attention should be paid to these signs.

The mind is not yet in pure contemplation.

In Visuddhi magga³ various preliminary stages of light nimitta are mentioned:

- such as cotton, silk wool or a draught,
- in the shape of a star,
- a crystal ball or
- a pearl,
- such as cottonseed or
- a bolt made of heartwood,
- like a long string or
- a garland or
- a column of smoke,
- like a stretched out copweb
- a film of clouds or
- a lotus blossom,
- a wagon wheel,
- like the moon disk or
- solar disk. ...

As people's perception is different, these different images appear.

However, when a brilliant white colour or a white light appears, the perception is purified and so is the breath. This is the sign of concentration, called *nimitta* in Pāḷi. With this image of the breath one can enter *jhāna*. The sign must appear at the place where the breath is observed, directly on the face. If it appears somewhere in the distance, it is not the *ānāpāna-nimitta*.

The mind can now see the breath through good concentration. Through the many wholesome moments of right concentration, the breath takes on a white or radiant colour and appears like light. Like all material things, breath as matter is made up of particles. Through the purification of the mind, the particles of the exhaled breath have this bright, radiant colour that the mind can now see. The *nimitta* always appears with the breath, only around the point where the breath is observed. When the *nimitta* is clear and stable, one should focus only on the *nimitta*. One has to observe the *nimitta*, a small white circle, a circle of light or a bright bubble, exactly at the place where one has observed the touch of the breath. The *nimitta* and the breath are one, the *nimitta* becomes breath and the breath becomes the *nimitta*. When the *nimitta* appears in a retreat for one day in each session and appears clearly and uninterruptedly for ten to fifteen minutes, it can be taken as the object of observation.

As long as one observes the point of contact of the breath on the skin, body consciousness arises, which is one of the five sense door consciousness. This consciousness is not as powerful as mind consciousness. Only when mind consciousness is present for a long time the mind can go into absorption. The *nimitta* can only be perceived with pure mind consciousness arising in the heart. It is easier, if the mind does not yet go into absorption, to maintain concentration without distractions if one takes the *nimitta* as an object, because it is calmer than the moving in-breath and out-breath. This is also a point of the fourth exercise according to Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, that the formations of the body, here as the breath, calm down. This step cannot be produced deliberately, but arises with increasing concentration. If the *nimitta* disappears, one must return to the breath. If this happens after a short time, one should stay with the breath. One should not jump back and forth

3 Visuddhi Magga, The Path of Purification, translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Kandy 2011, p. 277 f

between *nimitta* and breath. This would make the mind restless. If the *nimitta* is not stable it is better to stay with the breath. One must avoid seeing the *nimitta* with the eyes. It cannot be maintained with eye consciousness.

Another point must be clarified in order to achieve full concentration: The consciousness that has inhalation as its object is one consciousness; the consciousness that has exhalation as its object is another; and the consciousness that has the sign (*nimitta*) as its object is yet another.

These three processes of consciousness must be clearly distinguished.

One should not evaluate the *nimitta* as already described or wish to change it. One should not look at or analyze the image in terms of its appearance, colour or features. One should simply observe it attentively.

In Visuddhi Magga it is said that one should guard it like a queen guards the embryo of a world ruler. This also means that one should not make any violent movements, as this would result in miscarriage. You should guard it continuously and call upon it as often as possible, also during other activities. When the sign described appears, the hindrances are eliminated, mindfulness is established and the mind is in the access concentration.

Pure, strong perception is necessary for the counterpart image to be fully developed and that the mind enters absorption with the image. Perception (*saññā*) is a factor that needs to be sharpened in order to enter absorption. With superficial, distant observation, there is no entry into absorption. The mind must be awake and continuously close to the object.

It is important for the process of developing concentration to develop and balance the five faculties.

When the counterpart sign (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) appears without interruption and the mind is absorbed in this image, it is the first *jhāna*. One should reflect on the *jhāna* factors at the end of absorption.

Then one should develop the five skills.

Only when one has been able to dwell in the first absorption three times for about two hours one should develop the other absorptions and their skills. Once one has stabilized the four *jhānā* in this way, mindfulness of the in-breath and out-breath as *samatha* meditation is completed. Once one has attained the four *jhānā* with *ānāpāna*, it is easy to move on to other objects, such as ten *kaṣiṇa* or eight attainments or to *vipassanā* meditation.

In the Paṭisambhidāmagga⁴, the following more subtle hindrances are mentioned specifically for mindfulness of the in- and out-breath:

- *If one follows the in-breath internally with mindfulness to observe the beginning, middle and end, the consciousness becomes internally distracted, which is an obstacle to concentration.*
- *If one follows the out-breath outwards with mindfulness to observe the beginning, middle and end, the consciousness will be scattered externally, which is an obstacle to concentration.*
- *Such behavior as expectation, desire and craving for inhalation is an obstacle to concentration.*
- *Such behavior as expectation, desire and craving for exhalation is an obstacle to concentration.*
- *Excessive inhalation makes it louder until the exhalation is reached, which is a hindrance to concentration.*
- *Excessive exhalation makes it louder until the inhalation is reached, which is an obstacle to concentration.*

...

- *When thinking about the sign (*nimitta*), the consciousness and the in-breath become unsteady, which is an obstacle to concentration.*
- *When thinking about the inhalation, the consciousness and the sign become wavering, which is an obstacle to concentration.*

4 The Path of Discrimination, Paṭisambhidāmagga, translated into English by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, PTS Oxford, 2009, p. 165 f

- *When one thinks about the exhalation, the consciousness and the sign become wavering, which is an obstacle to concentration.*"

To summarize, one should neither make any wish about the breath nor think about it, but simply pay attention to what appears. An unconscious wish as to how the breath should be is also when one deliberately influences it. If one proceeds in this way, exhaustion arises very quickly.

Further obstacles are mentioned in the Paṭisambhidāmagga as:

- go into the past,
- go into the future,
- clinging consciousness,
- distracted consciousness creates restlessness,
- very open awareness will generate pleasure,
- a rejecting consciousness will generate anger.

Through all the obstacles mentioned, both the mental body (mental factors) and the consciousness become exhausted, wavering and agitated.

It requires wise attention to become aware of these obstacles and to cut them off.

Result of *ānāpānasati*

In SN 54.13 Anando I - Paṭhamaānandasuttaṃ the Buddha said to Ānanda:

"Concentration with ānāpānasati developed and practised frequently brings the four foundations of mindfulness to perfection.

The four foundations of mindfulness developed and practised frequently bring the seven awakening factors to completion.

The seven awakening factors, developed and practised frequently, bring knowledge and liberation to completion."

So we see here that *ānāpānasati* is the initial practice to attain awakening, which lies in liberation from all mental defilements. The Buddha himself also practised in this way. He attained perfect awakening based on *ānāpānasati* and the *jhānā* to be achieved with it.

Being familiar with *ānāpānasati* is also a good preparation for a peaceful death.

Although mindfulness of the in-breath and out-breath is a very common and well-known object of meditation, it is not suitable for everyone and at all times. This is why the Buddha taught forty subjects of meditation for *samatha* meditation, which we still find today in the Pāli Canon.

Ānāpānasati in the Pāli Canon

Mindfulness of inhalation and exhalation (*ānāpānasati*) was mainly taught by the Buddha in The Middle Length Discourses No. 118 Mindfulness of Breathing – *Ānāpānasatisuttaṃ* and in The Long Discourses No. 22 The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness - *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-suttaṃ*,

as well as in the Samyutta Nikāya 54 in the *Ānāpānasati Samyutta*.

In the Paṭisambhidāmagga, The Path of Discrimination, part of the Khuddaka Nikāya, which can be traced back to the Venerable Sāriputta, one of the main disciples of Gotama Buddha, there is a chapter on *ānāpānasati* with valuable advices for the practice.

The Ānāpānasati Sutta mentions 16 stages of contemplation. The first four steps are breath contemplation and belong to *samatha*. The further steps, five to sixteen, refer here to *vipassanā* meditation with the *ānāpānasati-jhānā* as objects.

In the Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta, the Buddha taught a different method. In the first chapter of the contemplations on the body, *ānāpānasati* is taught as *samatha* meditation only according to the 1st to 4th stage, on which *vipassanā* then follows.

SN 54.7 Kappino – Mahākappinasuttaṃ

"Now on that occasion the Venerable Mahakappina was sitting not far from the Blessed One, with his legs folded crosswise, holding his body straight, having set up mindfulness around his mouth. The Blessed One saw him sitting nearby, with his legs folded crosswise, his body straight, having set up mindfulness around his mouth. Having seen him, he addressed the bhikkhus thus:

'Bhikkhus, do you see any shaking or trembling in this bhikkhu's body?'

'Venerable sir, whenever we see that venerable one, whether he is sitting in the midst of the Sangha or sitting alone in private, we never see any shaking or trembling in that venerable one's body.'

'Bhikkhus, that bhikkhu gains at will, without trouble or difficulty, that concentration through the development and cultivation of which no shaking or trembling occurs in the body, and no shaking or trembling occurs in the mind. And what concentration is it through the development and cultivation of which no shaking or trembling occurs in the body, and no shaking or trembling occurs in the mind? It is, bhikkhus, when concentration by mindfulness of breathing has been developed and frequently practised that no shaking or trembling occurs in the body, and no shaking or trembling occurs in the mind. And how, bhikkhus, is concentration by mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated so that no shaking or trembling occurs in the body, and no shaking or trembling occurs in the mind? [the sixteenfold contemplation of the breath, see MN 118].' ..."

In the following sutta, the Buddha describes how mindfulness of in-and-out breath can be used as a basis for the path to perfect awakening:

SN 54.8 The Lamp – Padīpopamasuttaṃ

"... 'Concentration by mindfulness of in-breath and out-breath, bhikkhus, developed and practised frequently, is of great fruit and benefit. And how bhikkhus, is concentration by mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated so that it is of great fruit and benefit?'

'Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu, having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty hut, sits down. Having folded his legs crosswise, straightened his body, and set up mindfulness around the mouth, just mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out He trains thus: 'Contemplating relinquishment, I will breathe in'; he trains thus: 'Contemplating relinquishment, I will breathe out.'

'It is in this way, bhikkhus, that concentration by mindfulness of breathing is developed and frequently practised so that it is of great fruit and benefit.'

[Instructions Mindfulness of in-and-out breath see DN 22 follow here.]

"I too, bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, generally dwelt in this dwelling. While I generally dwelt in this dwelling, neither my body nor my eyes became fatigued and my mind, by not clinging, was liberated from the influxes."

"Therefore, bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu wishes: 'May neither my body nor my eyes become fatigued and may my mind, by not clinging, be liberated from the influxes,' this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to."

"Therefore, bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu wishes: 'May the memories and intentions connected with the household life be abandoned by me,' this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to."

"Therefore, bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the repulsive (paṭikūlasaññā) in the unrepulsive,' this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to."

If a bhikkhu wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive,' this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to."

If a bhikkhu wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive and the repulsive,' this

same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to.

If a bhikkhu wishes: 'May I dwell perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive and the unrepulsive,' this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to.

If a bhikkhu wishes: 'Avoiding both the unrepulsive and the repulsive, may I dwell equanimous, mindful and clearly comprehending,' this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to."

"Therefore, bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu wishes: 'May I, ... enter and dwell in the first jhāna, ... enter and dwell in the second jhāna, ... enter and dwell in the third jhāna ... enter and dwell in the fourth jhāna, ... this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to."

"Therefore, bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu wishes: 'May I, ... enter and dwell in the base of the infinity of space, ... enter and dwell in the base of the infinity of consciousness, ... enter and dwell in the base of nothingness, ... enter and dwell in the base of neither-perception-nor-nonperception', this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to."

"Therefore, bhikkhus, if a bhikkhu wishes: 'May I, by completely transcending the base of neither-perception-nor-nonperception, enter and dwell in the cessation of perception and feeling,' this same concentration by mindfulness of breathing should be closely attended to."

"When, bhikkhus, the concentration by mindfulness of breathing has been developed and frequently practised in this way, if he feels a pleasant feeling, he understands: 'It is impermanent'; he understands: 'It is not held to'; he understands: 'It is not delighted in.' If he feels an unpleasant feeling, he understands: 'It is impermanent'; he understands: 'It is not held to'; he understands: 'It is not delighted in.' If he feels a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands: 'It is impermanent'; he understands: 'It is not held to'; he understands: 'It is not delighted in.'"

"If he feels a pleasant feeling, he feels it detached; if he feels an unpleasant feeling, he feels it detached; if he feels a neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant feeling, he feels it detached."

"When he feels a feeling terminating with the body, he understands: 'I feel a feeling terminating with the body.' When he feels a feeling terminating with life, he understands: 'I feel a feeling terminating with life.' He understands: 'With the breakup of the body, following the exhaustion of life, all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool right here.'"

In SN 54.11 Icchānaṅgalaṃ - Icchānaṅgalasuttaṃ the Buddha describes the benefits of mindfulness of the in- and out- breath for himself, for disciples, and also for arahants. He had withdrawn into the forest for three months and reported:

"During the rains residence, friends, the Blessed One generally dwelt in the concentration by mindfulness of breathing."

"Here, bhikkhus, mindful I breathe in, mindful I breathe out. ..."

[and practised the sixteen-fold breath observation]

"If anyone, bhikkhus, speaking rightly could say of anything:

'It is a noble dwelling, a divine dwelling, the Tathagata's dwelling,' it is of concentration by mindfulness of breathing that one could rightly say this."

"Bhikkhus, those bhikkhus who are trainees, who have not attained their mind's ideal, who dwell aspiring for the unsurpassed security from bondage: for them concentration by mindfulness of breathing, when developed and frequently practised, leads to the decay of the influxes. Those bhikkhus who are arahants, whose influxes are decayed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached their own goal, utterly whose fetters of existence dried up, those completely liberated through final knowledge: for them concentration by mindfulness of breathing, when developed and frequently practised, leads to a pleasant dwelling in this very life and to mindfulness and clear comprehension."


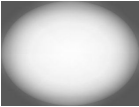
We see here that mindfulness of the in-breath and out-breath is useful at all stages of spiritual development. Even the arahant should still practise it in order to dwell happily and to see and understand the *dhmma* clearly. It should serve as a basis for *vipassanā* and it makes the mind malleable and adaptable without being delivered to unconscious perception.

Excerpt from: *Samatha bhāvanā – Konzentrationsmeditation* in den frühbuddhistischen Schriften und der Praxis des Theravāda-Buddhismus, Christina Garbe, 2021, 480 Seiten.

ISBN 978-3-00-068529-3

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Steps of Development Mindfulness of In-and-outbreath

1. observing the breath in the mouth and nose area	a. Distinguish: In-and-outbreath
	b. Knowing whether the in-and-outbreath are long or short. c. The entire breath, from beginning, middle to end, should be clearly recognized and fully conscious.
A learning sign (<i>uggaha nimitta</i>) may appear. No attention should be paid to it.	d. The breath becomes very subtle.
	The breath becomes visible as a sign (<i>nimitta</i>) in the mouth-nose area, as a white cloud or as light.
2. the counterpart sign (<i>paṭibhāga-nimitta</i>) appears continuously in several sitting periods as a bright light for at least 15 minutes.	The sign (<i>nimitta</i>) is now taken as the object of observation.
	The mind enters absorption with the counterpart sign, the first <i>jhāna</i> is attained.
3. development of the 1st <i>jhāna</i>	The absorption time must be extended up to 2 hours.
	Checking the Jhāna factors
	Development of the skills
4. developing the 2nd, 3rd, 4th <i>jhāna</i> and skills	