

Practicing One Object Brings Liberation

Breathing Meditation

(Anapanasati Sutta in Majjhima Nikaya)

All Buddhist doctrines focus on developing, virtue, mindfulness and wisdom. As much as we are able to practice these three disciplines as the Buddha taught, we can overcome suffering and can reach the final bliss of liberation, enlightenment. For this result we have to listen to the Buddha's message and practice it in our life promptly. Here, good attention (*Suvaca*), mindfulness (*Sati*) and wise investigation/ consideration (*Yoniso manikara*) are very important qualities that a disciple should cultivate from the beginning to the end of the path of purification.

In the discourse of *Anapanasati*, the Buddha explains "**When one thing is practiced and cultivated, other four things increase. When those four things increase, other seven things are well developed gradually. When those seven things grow up, other two things are visualized in life. What is that only one thing? It is practicing breathing meditation (*Anapanasati*).**" If someone wishes to get this result he/she has to listen to the Buddha's real message and practice it throughout his/her life.

"Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed and pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit. Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing (*Anapanasati*), when developed and pursued, brings the four applications of mindfulness (*Cattaro satipatthana*) to their fulfillment. The four applications of mindfulness, when developed and pursued, bring the seven factors of awakening (*Satta Bojjhanga*) to their fulfillment. The seven factors for awakening, when developed and pursued, bring clear knowing (*Vijja*) & liberation (*Vimutti*) to their fulfillment.

Here the Buddha describes breathing meditation in sixteen steps. From beginning to the end it gradually goes deep. When someone practices breathing meditation, he recognizes his natural breathing and focuses mind on breathing in and out keeping attention near the top of the nose or upper lip. He keeps his full attention with breathing in the present moment. The sixteen steps of breathing are;

1. Breathing in long, he recognizes (discerns), 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' (*Dīghaṃ vā assasanto: Dīghaṃ assasāmīti pajānāti. Dīghaṃ vā passasanto; Dīghaṃ passasāmīti pajānāti;*)
2. Breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' (*Rassaṃ vā assasanto: Rassaṃ assasāmīti pajānāti;. Rassaṃ vā passasanto: Rassaṃ passasāmīti pajānāti;*)
3. He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' (*Sabbakāyapaṭisaṇvedī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Sabbakāyapaṭisaṇvedī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)

4. He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.' (*Passambhayaṃ kāyaṣaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmīti sikkhati; Passambhayaṃ kāyaṣaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
5. He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to rapture, and to breathe out sensitive to rapture. (*Pītipaṭisaṇvedī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Pītipaṭisaṇvedī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
6. He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to pleasure, and to breathe out sensitive to pleasure. (*Sukhapaṭisaṇvedī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Sukhapaṭisaṇvedī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
7. He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to mental processes, and to breathe out sensitive to mental processes. (*Cittasaṅkhārapaṭisaṇvedī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Cittasaṅkhārapaṭisaṇvedī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
8. He trains himself to breathe in calming mental processes, and to breathe out calming mental processes. (*Passambhayaṃ cittasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmīti sikkhati; Passambhayaṃ cittasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
9. He trains himself to breathe in sensitive to the mind, and to breathe out sensitive to the mind. (*Cittapaṭisaṇvedī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Cittapaṭisaṇvedī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
10. He trains himself to breathe in satisfying the mind, and to breathe out satisfying the mind. (*Abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ assasissāmīti sikkhati; Abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
11. He trains himself to breathe in steadying the mind, and to breathe out steadying the mind. (*Samādahaṃ cittaṃ assasissāmīti sikkhati; Samādahaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
12. He trains himself to breathe in releasing the mind, and to breathe out releasing the mind. (*Vimocayaṃ cittaṃ assasissāmīti sikkhati; Vimocayaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
13. He trains himself to breathe in focusing on inconstancy, and to breathe out focusing on inconstancy. (*Aniccānupassī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Aniccānupassī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
14. He trains himself to breathe in focusing on dispassion,[1] and to breathe out focusing on dispassion. (*Virāgānupassī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Virāgānupassī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
15. He trains himself to breathe in focusing on cessation, and to breathe out focusing on cessation. (*Nirodhānupassī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Nirodhānupassī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)
16. He trains himself to breathe in focusing on relinquishment, and to breathe out focusing on relinquishment. (*Paṭinissaggānupassī assasissāmīti sikkhati; Paṭinissaggānupassī passasissāmīti sikkhati;*)

According to the above steps, when someone practices breathing meditation, *Anapanasati bhavana*, it results in developing four things, the fourfold mindfulness. They are;

- The contemplation of the body (*Kayanupassana*)
- The contemplation of feelings (*Vedananupassana*)
- The contemplation of the consciousness (*Cittanupassana*)
- The contemplation of mental formations (*Dhammanupassana*)

As the result of fulfilling mindfulness, it is able to understand someone's entire life that is mind and body. Mind always changes, and body also changes. There is nothing to hold as permanent, happy or a soul. Mind and body are not related to a person. It is only a result of cause and effect. With this understanding ignorance gradually ceases. And desire and anger also cease little by little.

According to the discourse, when these fourfold mindfulness is fulfilled in our life, other seven factors of enlightenment (*Satta Bojjhangha*) gradually increase. They are;

1. Mindfulness (*Sati sambojjhangha*)
2. Keen investigation of the Dhamma (*Dhammavicaya sambojjhangha*)
3. Energy (*Viriya sambojjhangha*)
4. Rapture or happiness (*Peeti sambojjhangha*)
5. Calmness (*Passaddhi sambojjhangha*)
6. Tranquility (*Samadhi sambojjhangha*)
7. Equanimity (*Upekkha sambojjhangha*)

When we practice mindfulness about our body and mind, as the Buddha mentioned, we can see the impermanence about mind and body. It means every moment our experience that we receive through our senses arises and ceases. With this understanding we are further prompted to investigate doctrines in Buddhism through our life. We reach deeper, reflecting on the Buddha's teachings, seeing our life. That is named keen investigation of the Dhamma. And we try to overcome evil and cultivate good. As the result of this practice every moment the Dhamma follower is ready to understand his mind and body. He doesn't give any chance to defilements such as anger, desire, jealousy, delusion etc. to come to his mind and disturb his peace of mind. Also he always cultivates good positive thoughts such as generosity, compassion, friendliness, mindfulness, wisdom, kindness. In this way he practices energy that is more important to be happy without defilements. He always lives happily as he practices good. This happiness causes to be quiet and calm. His mind goes to calm down with this understanding. His mind is also concentrated with positive thoughts. He can keep his mind for a long time without five hindrances. When he sees everything as impermanence, he finds equanimity in pleasure and displeasure. He doesn't go to extremes. His mind is unshaken among everything whether good or bad even the world is destroyed.

As the result of practicing four mindfulnesses, these seven factors of enlightenment grow. That is why Buddhism always emphasizes the importance of developing mindfulness. As much as someone is developing seven factors of enlightenment, he can realize wisdom and liberation (*Vijja Vimutti*) from suffering. Wisdom means understanding of impermanence or dependent origination (*Paticcasamuppada*). With this knowledge, the disciple of the Buddha can see the world as it is. Intellectual world always arises and ceases. We create the world at the moment and get experience at the moment. We have only present moment. The past ended, the future didn't come yet. The present moment also arises and ceases with the conditions at the moment. We can get nothing as permanent. It is no soul, egolessness. This is the world reality. If someone has this understanding and its reflection, he can overcome all kinds of sufferings.

On this path, four things should be developed from the beginning to the end. They are;

- Associating good friends who explain the Buddha's message with impermanence.
- Listen to the Buddha's message with dependent origination
- Wise reflection on the Buddha's message which is the world reality.
- Practice discipline, tranquility and insight meditation, seeing impermanence

When we go on the path of enlightenment, we can understand the four noble truths. They are;

1. Unsatisfactoriness (*Dukkha Sacca*)
2. Cause of unsatisfactoriness (*Samudaya Sacca*)
3. Cessation of unsatisfactoriness (*Nirodha Sacca*)
4. The path that leads to the cessation of unsatisfactoriness (*Magga Sacca*)

Here it is very important that, at the very beginning of the path of liberation, we must have a clear understanding about the path that the Buddha explained. According to the Buddha's message, if we can practice breathing meditation with the knowledge of dependent origination, *paticcasomuppada*, we begin to realize the four noble truths in our life. What are the four noble truths? The first one is the unsatisfactoriness or suffering. Here it is described in several steps such as birth, old age, sickness, death Finally the Buddha describes as summery of five aggregates are suffering. They are matter (*Rupa*), feelings (*Vedana*), perceptions (*Sanna*), mental formations (*Sankhara*) and consciousness (*Vinnana*). When we get some experience through our senses, these five aggregates arise together and also they cease together. The five aggregates is our real world. This world arises at the moment with the conditions, and it ceases at the moment when conditions cease. If we get some kinds of experience through our senses such as eyes, ears, nose, as forms, sounds, smells that experience arises at the moment and it ceases at the moment without anything remaining. It is said in Buddhism; **Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence** (අනුත්වා සම්භූතං භුත්වා න භවිස්සති). This is the nature of impermanence that Buddhism illuminates.

If someone can understand this reality, he is able to understand the cause of unsatisfactoriness which is strong attachment, desire or greed. If we know the cause of suffering, we are able to get rid of suffering that is overcoming desire. Then we find the path that leads to getting rid of suffering, which is the eight fold path. Then we go fast on the path of purification reducing defilements day and night. With this knowledge we focus all our strength in the name of getting rid of suffering in every moment. Before we reach old age, become weak and die, we try to get the results without wasting our valuable time.

May the Triple Gem Bless you!

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