

Robert Cusick 12-16-2009



## Meditation

Many people in the West have taken up meditation for a specific reason – for relaxation, stress management, gaining equanimity, etc. But the real goal of meditation is to attain freedom from suffering. All these other things, which are valuable and useful, are just fringe benefits.

There are several effective meditation methodologies, but tonight we are going to discuss anapanasati, meaning mindfulness (sati) of breathing in and out (anapana), or more commonly “mindfulness of breathing. ” Although simple, this is far from a technique just for beginners. The Buddha himself was a practitioner—his last night on earth was spent in anapanasati.

"Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.118.than.html>

There are two major types of mediation practice in use today, concentration (samadhi) or calm (samatha) and insight (vipassana). Both approaches lead to the same goal; which one works better typically depends on the personality or character of the practitioner.

Meditation is like a plank of wood. Let's say vipassana is one end of the plank and samatha is the other. If you were to pick the plank up, would just one end come up or would both of them? Of course, when you pick up the plank, both ends come up together. What is vipassana? What is samatha? They are the mind itself.

- Ajahn Chah

The breath is one type of mediation object . Metta (loving kindness), for example, can also be used as a meditation object. With metta meditation, there is no clinging; it is a love without attachment. Typically, the practitioner cultivates loving-kindness towards him- or herself, and then expands outwards towards loved ones, family, friends, teachers, and, eventually towards strangers, enemies, and all sentient beings. However, tonight we will be discussing the breath as the anchor or object of meditation.

The breath can be used as a meditation object in different ways. The first step, counting or ganana, is a good way to learn to control the mind during meditation.

When the meditator sits down for meditation, he fixes his attention at the tip of his nose and consciously attends to the sequence of in-and-out breathing. He notes the breath as it enters, and notes the breath as it leaves, touching against the tip of the nose or the upper lip. At this time he begins to count these movements.

There are a few methods of counting. The easiest is explained thus: The first breath felt is counted as "one, one"; the second as "two, two"; the third as "three, three"; the fourth as "four, four"; the fifth as "five, five" and so on up to the tenth breath which is counted as "ten, ten." Then he returns to "one, one" and continues again up to "ten, ten." This is repeated over and over from one to ten.

The mere counting is not itself meditation, but the counting has become an essential aid to meditation. A person who has not practiced meditation before, finding it difficult to understand the nature of his mind, may think he is meditating while his mind runs helter skelter. Counting is an easy method to control the wandering mind. If a person fixes his mind well on his meditation, he can maintain this counting correctly. If the mind flees in all directions, and he misses the count, he becomes confused and thus can realize that his mind has wandered about. If the mind has lost track of the count, the meditator should begin the counting over again. In this way he should start the counting again from the beginning, even if he has gone wrong a thousand times.

[http://www.vipassana.com/meditation/anapanasati\\_meditation\\_on\\_breathing.php](http://www.vipassana.com/meditation/anapanasati_meditation_on_breathing.php)

The second step is following or pursuing (anubandhana) the breath. Although this may sound as if the instruction is to have your awareness follow the breath around in the body, that is not the case. Identify the spot on your upper lip, or the tip of your nose, right between the two nostrils. This is the gatekeeper spot, the anapanna spot, where one can monitor the breath coming in and going out. Keep the awareness at that spot, and don't let awareness follow the breath down into the body and back. Wait at the anapanna spot for the incoming breath, the pause as direction changes, and then the outgoing breath.

The Buddha has declared in that a meditator trains himself thinking: "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body, and I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body." Here, what is meant as "the whole body" is the entire cycle of breathing in and breathing out. The meditator should fix his attention so as to see the beginning, the middle and the end of each cycle of in-breathing and out-breathing. It is this practice that is called "experiencing the whole body."

The beginning, middle and end of the breath must be correctly understood. It is incorrect to consider the tip of the nose to be the beginning of the breath, the chest to be the middle, and the navel to be the end. If one attempts to trace the breath from the nose through the chest to the belly, or to follow it out from the belly through the chest to the

nose, one's concentration will be disrupted and one's mind will become agitated. The beginning of the in-breath, properly understood, is the start of the inhalation, the middle is continued inhalation, and the end is the completion of the inhalation. Likewise, in regard to the out breath, the beginning is the start of the exhalation, the middle is the continued exhalation, and the end is the completion of the exhalation. To "experience the whole body" means to be aware of the entire cycle of each inhalation and exhalation, keeping the mind fixed at the spot around the nostrils or on the upper lip where the breath is felt entering and leaving the nose.

This work of contemplating the breath at the area around the nostrils, without following it inside and outside the body, is illustrated by the commentaries with the similes of the gatekeeper and the saw.

Just as a gatekeeper examines each person entering and leaving the city only as he passes through the gate, without following him inside or outside the city, so the meditator should be aware of each breath only as it passes through the nostrils, without following it inside or outside the body.

Just as a man sawing a log will keep his attention fixed on the spot where the teeth of the saw cut through the wood, without following the movement of the teeth back and forth, so the meditator should contemplate the breath as it swings back and forth around the nostrils, without letting his mindfulness be distracted by the breath's inward and outward passage through the body.

[http://www.vipassana.com/meditation/anapanasati\\_meditation\\_on\\_breathing.php](http://www.vipassana.com/meditation/anapanasati_meditation_on_breathing.php)

One of the techniques for refining and developing Mindfulness Breathing is to meditate on the Four Elements (earth, air, fire, water). The properties associated with these elements are described in the Maha-Rahulovada Sutta (MN 62)

"And what is the earth property? The earth property can be either internal or external. What is the internal earth property?} Anything internal, within oneself, that's hard, solid, & sustained [by craving]: head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, membranes, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's hard, solid, and sustained: This is called the internal earth property. Now both the internal earth property & the external earth property are simply earth property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the earth property and makes the earth property fade from the mind.

"And what is the water property? The water property may be either internal or external. What is the internal water property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's

water, watery, & sustained: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, oil, saliva, mucus, oil-of-the-joints, urine, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's water, watery, & sustained: This is called the internal water property. Now both the internal water property & the external water property are simply water property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the water property and makes the water property fade from the mind.

"And what is the fire property? The fire property may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's fire, fiery, & sustained: that by which [the body] is warmed, aged, & consumed with fever; and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed, & savored gets properly digested; or anything else internal, within oneself, that's fire, fiery, & sustained: This is called the internal fire property. Now both the internal fire property & the external fire property are simply fire property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the fire property and makes the fire property fade from the mind.

"And what is the wind property? The wind property may be either internal or external. What is the internal wind property? Anything internal, belonging to oneself, that's wind, windy, & sustained: up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the stomach, winds in the intestines, winds that course through the body, in-and-out breathing, or anything else internal, within oneself, that's wind, windy, & sustained: This is called the internal wind property. Now both the internal wind property & the external wind property are simply wind property. And that should be seen as it actually is present with right discernment: 'This is not mine, this is not me, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is present with right discernment, one becomes disenchanted with the wind property and makes the wind property fade from the mind.

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.062.than.html>

As we meditate on these elements, we must remember that none of them are "self." By becoming aware of the properties of each of these elements, we loosen the attachment to the body as a whole.

There are three characteristics of existence: Impermanence (anicca), Suffering (dukkha), and Nonself (anatta). Vipassana meditation is discerning these characteristics in every moment.

***Impermanence:*** *When one looks at a candle flame, it appears as though it is a separate thing. In actuality, it is constantly burning itself away. There is not one flame that exists from moment to moment. The same is true of the sensations that make up the totality one's phenomenal experience.*

*If we pay attention to the activity of breathing, we notice that one moment the belly is rising, and the next it is falling. If we pay close attention to our hands and feet, we notice the quick rise and fall of each tingling sensation (i.e. vibrations). Each pulse, flicker, itch, and subtle movement will be seen to arise and vanish completely many times during each second of observation. Thoughts and mental images suddenly appear, and then vanish as quickly as they came. Everything that can be observed will be seen to arise and then vanish. This is perhaps the simplest way to observe any of the Three Characteristics, so it's a good place to start.*

**Suffering:** *There are two simple ways to observe the Suffering characteristic. First, Suffering is said to be concealed by changing in to different postures. For example, if one decides to sit for a long period, they will eventually have to use the bathroom. The discomfort of a full bladder causes one to get up. When we examine our experience we see that we are always changing position to relieve discomfort of some kind. Realizing this, we realize the Suffering Characteristic.*

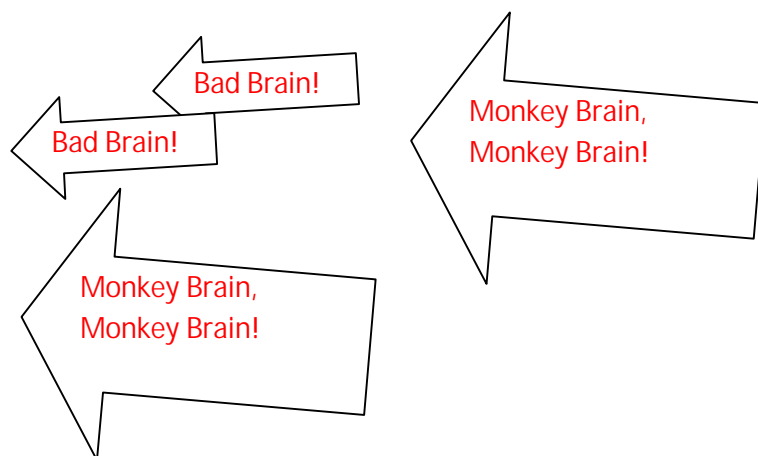
*The second way the Suffering Characteristic is observed is to notice how nothing can be held on to. A pleasant mind state arises, and we think, "Yes, this is it! I could stay like this forever." But the state changes, even if we don't want it to. In each moment one is either visited by unpleasant circumstances or watching the pleasant circumstances fall away. As painful and frustrating this is to experience, directly apprehending the Suffering Characteristic in this way brings insight.*

**Nonself:** *There are two basic ways to observe the characteristic of Nonself. First, as one observes the characteristics of Impermanence and Suffering, the meditator will understand that there is no one in control of what occurs. Thoughts just come and go. Pains and discomforts just happen, without any prior authorization from an "I." Even the recognition of these processes seems to arise naturally without any prompting. With the realization that no one is running the show, we observe the Nonself Characteristic.*

*The second way to observe the characteristic of Nonself is through the practice of self-inquiry... After noticing that no observable phenomena seem to be controlled by a separate observer, the meditator may ask, "Then who/what am I?" By asking, "Who am I?" the meditator begins the active search for a self essence. But s/he will quickly discover that anything that can be observed is by definition NOT an observer. When the sensations of experience that lie previously hidden are revealed, the meditator will continue to apprehend thus: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." The Nonself Characteristic is perhaps the most of important of all three. In the words of the Burmese meditation teacher Sayadaw U Silananda, "No realization of Truth can occur without the knowledge of the anatta (no-soul) nature of things."*

<http://truthaparadox.wordpress.com/2009/07/27/the-three-characteristics-a-practical-introduction/>

However simple these instructions may seem, there is a major barrier to success. The problem with minds is that they think – after all, that’s what they are supposed to do. We may start off well, in ganana for example, simply counting the breathing in and breathing out up to ten, then starting over. This is very simple, very easy to do. As we reflect on how easy it is, and how it reminds us of the time that... oops. We suddenly find that we didn’t stop at ten but just kept going .... 17...18... This is completely normal, and it is very important that you do not criticize yourself for losing track. Don’t berate yourself. This happens to everyone, even experienced meditators.



# Don't do this to yourself

When you notice that you have stopped concentrating on the breath, it is just your mind doing what it does.... thinking. Don't judge yourself, just bring your attention back to the issue at hand, and start your count or meditation again.

The moment when you realize your mind has gone off on its own, that moment is a moment of mindfulness, a moment of awareness. We want to increase these moments, both in number and duration.

One of the states to strive for is an aware non-reactive state. If a sales representative knocks on your door while you are meditating, register the knock - notice it – but don't react to it. Just let it go through your mind, "not interested", and don't wonder who it was, what they wanted, etc.

"Monks, I am content with this practice. I am content at heart with this practice. So arouse even more intense persistence for the attaining of the as-yet-unattained, the reaching of the as-yet-unreached, the realization of the as-yet-unrealized."