

215hh- Mindfulness Of Breathing And Calming Of The Aversion

By Ajahn Nyanamoli Thero

(A Summarised Transcription of a Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

"The Blessed One said, "Monks, do you develop mindfulness/recollection of in- E -out breathing?" When this was said, Ven. Arittha replied to the Blessed One, "I develop mindfulness of in- E -out breathing, lord."

"But how do you develop mindfulness of in- E -out breathing, Arittha?"

*"Having abandoned sensual desire for past sensual pleasures, having done away with sensual desire for future sensual pleasures, and having thoroughly subdued perceptions of irritation/aversion/resistance (*paṭighasaññā*) with regard to internal E external events, I breathe in mindfully and breathe out mindfully."*

"There is that mindfulness of in- E -out breathing, Arittha. I don't say that there isn't. But as to how mindfulness of in- E -out breathing is brought in detail to its culmination, listen and pay close attention. I will speak..."

...The Blessed One said, "And how, Arittha, is mindfulness of in- E -out breathing brought in detail to its culmination? There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body upright, and bringing recollection to the fore. Always recollected, he breathes in; recollected he breathes out.

"Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.'..." - [Sn54.6](#)

Some might think that what Arittha described is not correct mindfulness of breathing but the Buddha didn't disagree with him and then offered a *different* practice. On the contrary, he acknowledged it but then added that his practice is not complete. Then he went to describe how to develop Ven Arittha's mindfulness of breathing to fulfilment. Arittha's practice was enough for freedom from sensuality, which he claimed, and the Buddha didn't dispute. However, it was not enough for final liberation and uprooting of all conceit. So if you practice that mindfulness of breathing in that simply sense that he described, which is by the way how every anapanasati instruction begins : "Recollected he breathes in, Recollected he breathes out", that's all you need to know and if you stick to that as the Ven.Arittha did you will overcome any desire towards sensual objects of the present, past and future. In other words, you would have surmounted the entire domain of sensual craving and most importantly you would have completely subdued that *patigha* towards your own senses. Which is enough for having the five lower fetters destroyed.

Mindfulness of breathing is often taken as a mechanical method, and so to avoid that mistake, it would be better to first follow Ven. Arritha's instructions because it would prevent you from falling into a mindless 'in-and-out-breathing-focussing-visualisation' technique. It would force you to develop knowledge of the enduring breath underneath your experience, regardless of the mental, emotional, or physical state. (That's also how *anapanasati* brings *satipatthana* to fulfilment.) As the Suttas say, *recollected* he breathes in or out. They don't say "focused" or "concentrated" he breathes in or out.

If you overcome all sensuality and subdue all of the *patigha* that you have towards your own senses and towards anything or anyone in the world, present, past or future, then you will be ready to follow the Buddha's detailed instructions on *anapanasati*. You will also know exactly what he means, otherwise, you will be doing his instructions with sensuality and as a method that you think will result in a "Greater sensual pleasure for me!". Any greatness of mindfulness of breathing can only be developed upon complete surmounting of sensuality or overcoming the five lower fetters.

That breath underneath your experience that is always enduring and which you don't lose sight of (the knowledge of the breath being there), is an anchor for mindfulness. You can focus on that physical side if you want but you must first know that the breathing is underneath you, that's really what the anchor is. Using the enduring breath that's already there happening to you, underneath your emotional state, etc, as an anchor for mindfulness and then investing effort into not losing sight of that peripherally. You don't need to stop doing what you are doing in order to breathe, but you can certainly not allow yourself to be absorbed into what you're doing, so that you forget that breathing is happening in the background. It's about learning how not to overly commit to the foreground attention and learning how to stretch your mind to discern 'both ends' (background and foreground) simultaneously enduring. That's why, when you develop *samadhi*/composure, the mind becomes pliable, it can stretch, it's no longer a hard twisted lump.

Q: Having become accomplished in virtue and sense restraint, things calm down and then the reality of the body becomes clearer.

Nm: That reality of the body will first present itself as unpleasant and confining because you will experience the fundamental *patigha* that you have towards it, you are going to experience this physical resistance, sickness, like a heroin addict going through withdrawal because you're withdrawing from the entire domain of 'sensual being' (*kamabhava*). However, you have to abandon that *patigha*/aversion, that aversion towards your own senses which are no longer engaging with sensual distractions. That's why the sensual desire is so powerful because the aversion towards being confined within the body underneath it is extremely strong and the only means of escape, that an ordinary person knows, is sensual pleasure, which is no escape at all.

Q: In a way, that's the first thing you do as you are born, your first act is to try and escape that fundamental discomfort. Your senses are agitated and you don't want that pain and so you automatically reach away from that and into the direction of sensual objects.

Nm: That's what is meant by 'underlying tendencies'. The baby is not doing anything but the mind is paired with the senses and they are uncomfortable, however subtle it may be. There is nothing else there except that discomfort for a newborn mind and what an unenlightened mind does, regardless of the type of discomfort it is experiencing, is it wants to get rid of it. So naturally on that fundamental level when the baby is experiencing the discomfort of its new born body/senses, it naturally goes in the direction of sense objects. Not that it chooses to but the discomfort pushes it in that direction and then everything else it starts encountering in the world, the mother, breastfeeding, etc, just becomes a confirmation of that direction where it found relative safety from this discomfort which itself is, this unsafety of the body.

Q: By knowing the sense organs for what they are, means that you experience them as uncomfortable, pressured and agitated.

Nm: Yes, practically speaking, you will experience them as a pressure. However there is only pressure when you have ignorance, which the baby does, it has an underlying tendency of *avijja*. If there was no *avijja* in that baby's mind, it would not have been born. If you begin to know and see the sense organs clearly and sustain that clarity, you will begin to diminish your ignorance in regards to them, your appropriation of them, your assumption of ownership. You will get to understand that resisting them is futile and therefore your aversion will also fade.

Q: The body is fundamentally agitated.

Nm: The nature of form/*rupa* is to deform, the elements which it is made up of are changing and reshaping and your body is doing the same.

Q: You cannot just remove that bodily discomfort because that is the body. You have to somehow make peace with it.

Nm: By removing your aversion towards the senses, that's how you make peace. You subdue all perceptions of *patigha* by thoroughly developing sense restraint, keeping a close eye on them so that they don't get polluted by the unwholesome.

Q: If you had to suppress the body, trying to not let it sense anything, it would just get more agitated.

Nm: If you want to calm down these wild animals, these untamed sense organs, you can't just give them what they want and you certainly won't calm them down by beating and starving them either. You need to give them the right kind of food when needed and not too much.