

BREATH MEDITATION – BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

Meditation is the only way to acquire highest happiness in a life, which is the happiest action in the world. This article will discuss how to observe a breath in a scientific manner as an object for self-realization in Insight Meditation or *Anapanasati Vipassana Bhavana*.

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Meditation has become a very popular technique to seek serenity and calmness in a mind. In the Buddhist Teachings, there are two types of meditation techniques that have been taught such as One-pointed or Tranquility Meditation (*Samatha Bhavana*) and Insight Meditation (*Vipassana Bhavana*).

Samatha Bhavana is very popular in modern societies and it brings stillness in a mind. The stillness is the rest that is needed for the busy and scattered mind with all sorts of emotional thoughts arising in a day-to-day life. Buddhist Teachings go further beyond Samatha Bhavana known as Vipassana Bhavana or Insight Meditation where you will receive not only relaxation, calmness and stillness of a mind, but also it brings the realization of the true nature of existence of a life or the mind and body.

The Nature of Mind and Body (*Nama-Rupa*)

The body consists of two basic components namely mind and body or matter (*Nama-Rupa*). The matter is a tangible part that contains solids (*Patavi*), liquids (*Apo*), heat (*Tejo*) and air (*Vayo*). The mind (*Nama*) is the intangible part which carries a different emotional flow of thoughts consistently throughout the lifespan from birth to death. The root cause for these various types of emotional thoughts such as happiness, sadness, anger, frustration, stress, restlessness etc are based on lust (*Lobha*), anger (*Dosa*) and delusion (*Moha*).

Lust, Anger, and Delusion

Lust thoughts are the result of attachments to many desired elements (tangible and non-tangible) in the world. Anger thoughts arise due to detachment of desired elements and attachments of non-desired elements for your mind and body.

Delusion is non-realization of existing reality. The delusion is

1. a wrong perception that everything is permanent,
2. a wrong perception that brings happiness through external elements and are permanent,
3. a wrong perception that everything in the world including your mind and body is under your control.

Vipassana Meditation is based on the real truth which is presently existing in the world. The objects taken for Vipassana Meditation are components of a body and mind. In Vipassana Meditation one can observe the reality of the body and mind in the perspective of impermanence (*anatta*), suffering (*dukkha*) and selflessness (*anatma*). The most important aspect of Vipassana Meditation is that it will bring you both relaxation and realization for a life together.

This article focuses on how to use breath as an object (*Aarammana*) for the Insight Meditation (*Anapana Sati Bhavana*) as Vipassana Bhavana.

Concentration Vs Meditation

The human body consists of a body (physical and tangible component) and a mind. A most difficult element in the world to be kept in discipline is a mind. The mind does not stay isolation. It always attached to an object and it is continuously picking different objects at a time, identify, analyzes, evaluate, and make an assessment of the selected object. This is a process which continues from birth to death. This impermanent or unsteady nature of mind is commonly known as "Monkey Mind".

When we do an action, to get optimum result, the mind and body should act together. This is called mindful action or action with full of concentration. But most of day to day activities are done without such concentration. Most of the actions are done as a practice without such concentration or mindfulness. Even though we do an action with mindfulness or concentration, there is a desire behind such action. In return, we expect some sort of benefits such as happiness profits, appreciation etc. etc. If the result receives through such action is not favorable, we get negative emotions such as anger, sadness, jealousy, frustration, stress etc. If any concentrated action is integrated with lust, anger and delusion, it is not considered as a meditative action.

In Meditation, we concentrate our mind attached to an object. The final result will be some sort of serenity or calmness in the body and the mind without any emotional conditions related to lust, anger, and delusion.

Samatha Bhavana or Tranquility Meditation is a technique used to keep a mind attached to an object for a longer period of time which brings you different level of serenity in the mind.

Objects for Meditation

Different objects can be selected on your choice to keep the mind in one-pointed position and stay in concentration in Samatha Bhavana. There are forty objects can be selected for this purpose. In Vipassana Bhavana, it is mainly concentrated on body elements or body action.

In breath meditation, we consider the air component of the body. In the Buddhist Teachings, the active air component of a body is identified in six categories. (Please note that there is an air space known as Akasa which is occupied by your body and inside an ear, a nose etc. This air is not active)

1. Air travels upwards inside a body
2. Air travels downwards inside a body
3. Air operates within the digestion system of a body
4. Air operates outside the digestion system of a body
5. Inhale and exhale (Breathing)
6. Air helps to move different parts of a body to carry out different actions and functions.

Air component of a body helps to maintain necessary temperature levels of a body, to maintain necessary physical formation of a body and to maintain necessary pressure levels of different liquids of a body. The breath is the centered feature of all these operations. It is a natural phenomenon that breath plays the primary and comprehensive role to keep body and mind alive in whole life from birth to conventional death. Without breath, there is no life in a body and body and mind combination does not exist within a body as one entity.

Therefore, the breath is the good and appropriate object for meditation which contains many different features and operations to observe.

Breath Meditation for serenity.

Breath Meditation is very popular present days where the breath is taken as an object to keep a mind in one-pointed position. The practice is appropriate as it stops monkey behavior of a mind. A mind is continuously picking up the different object at a time analyze the object and jump into an object. This process is going on and on. Once the mind stays in one position attached to an object, the mind receives a lot of relaxation and rest that is why mind and body stay in serenity during meditation. It helps to stop various types of emotions aroused in a mind such as anger, sorrow, frustration, restlessness, stress etc for a short period of time. After the meditation, the thoughts are returning to normal. The normal thoughts are characterized by lust, anger, and delusion in a day to day life. When you practice this meditation regularly, your mind begins to stay longer periods of time without such emotional thoughts. That is why meditation brings you calmness to your life.

Breath Meditation in Buddhist Perspective.

The Buddhist Philosophy and the Buddhist Teachings are based on the three natural phenomena such as:

- 1, Impermanence (*Anatta*) – All the elements in the world are subjected to change constantly.
- 2, Suffering (*Dukkha*) – Final result of any occurrence with life ends with emotions such as sorrow, frustration, stress, depression etc. Happiness is very short and it does not stay in mind for the longer period of time.
3. Selflessness (*Anatma*) – Nothing can be controlled by anyone in this world. Everything is beyond your control (uncontrollable nature of existence). It is the Law of Nature (Dhamma Niyaama). God or any invisible powers are not operating behind nature. Nature is the result of a number of causes taking place in the world or multiverse.

The number of meditation techniques is described in the Buddha Teachings in order to realize above three phenomena by yourself. This is called as *VIPASSANA BHAVANA*. In this context, it is better to be aware what is understanding and what realization is. For an example, everyone knows that a flame of fire will burn you. That is the knowledge. Even though you know the phenomena of burning, till you touch it, you do not experience the real sense of in burning nature of the flame. Realization is real world experience based on knowledge, understanding, and feelings.

The breath meditation (*ANAPANA SATI BHAVANA*) is one of the meditations which are more common in the modern societies. We can observe a breath with the fully concentrated mind in line with the above natural phenomena such as impermanence nature of breath, uncontrollable nature of breath. Also, you can stop breathing and experience how badly you suffer for a moment. During meditation only, we can observe and realize that how much we enjoy the breathing without our sense and without our knowledge. If you do not observe these phenomena in the breath meditation, you never realize the effect of a breath till you face a death moment where you have to leave the breath from

your body which is directly connected with final thought known as death consciousness.

Now we can have the closer look at the breath in different perspective scientifically in order to reach more clear knowledge, understanding and realization of above phenomena during breath meditation.

Breath is impermanence.

When you make an inhale, the wind or air touches the nostril and it travels into the lungs and returns and exit as an exhale through the nostril. If you totally concentrate and observe this process, you will feel the nature of breath such as a long breath, as a short breath and the sensation of the breath with different temperature levels of a breath. You will begin to realize that the breath you inhale is changing in every instance and what you exhale is totally a different breath. The breath has a start, continuity or change and end. The thought that you attached to the original breath is always arising and changing and passing away till it exhales. This process keeps on continuing throughout your meditation. This way you begin to realize that the impermanence nature of a breath, as well as the impermanence nature of the thoughts that attached to the breath.

Breath, Physical Body Formation, and Impermanence

When you inhale a breath, you will experience how the body, (especially the tummy) inflates. When you exhale the breath, you will experience the deflation of the body (tummy). This way, you can concentrate how breath and body formation changes constantly which is again impermanence nature of breath and body formation. The body does not stay in a permanence position in any moment of a lifetime. The changes in body formation help to activate the heart and circulate the blood throughout the body. Blood is the main source of fuel that supplies the energy to operate all the components of the body. Also, the active air supply through the breath keeps the pressure of all the liquids of the body at the appropriate level to function and to keep all the components of the body active and alive.

Breath, Body Chemistry, and Impermanence

In each and every breath, it brings oxygen into the body and disposes carbon dioxide from the body. This way at each breath, the body chemistry changes and regenerates each and every body cell. This process is taken place from birth to death in our lives. This regeneration process is very fast. With our ordinary organs or five senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body), we cannot perceive the instant changes that take place constantly in our body. It is found that the time taken to regenerate one cell is smaller than the nanosecond. Our six organs such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body are not sensitive enough to scan this process. The regeneration process is very fast. We have to develop Insight in order to perceive these changes in the Insight Mediation.

Breath as part of natural process

The breath is a part of natural process. You can observe a breath as a natural process, which is taking place continuously within your body. You cannot control the breath as you want. It is arising, changing, continuing and passing

away. The uncontrollable nature of breath can be identified as SELFLESSNESS or *ANATMA*. In a day to day life, you do not realize the real nature of the breath. When you make an attention (*Mansikara*) to the breath during meditation, you will begin to realize the natural phenomena of breath.

Why breath brings suffering?

Now you know that the breath is impermanent and it is beyond your control. The changing process of breath directly links to the changing process of a body which results in aging and decaying of body cells brings a different type of illnesses and all types of body pains. Finally, each breath you take directs your physical body towards the end of life, on the other way which shortens your life span by one breath. All these natural happenings can be grouped as suffering or *Dukkha*.

How breath meditation brings you relaxation, happiness, and realization?

This is the most important aspect of the meditation. Once you begin to aware, understand and realize the natural process of the life through meditation. You gradually begin to accept the natural process and phenomena as they are and let them go as they are. You do not create berries in your mind and do not create stresses and frustrations within yourself. Eventually, you will begin to realize that nature cannot be avoided and the barriers that you want to create against nature will be a tiring and useless effort. This understanding and realization bring you a sense of nonattachment to your breath and body slowly. Regular practice is needed to build up a stronger sense of nonattachment. This is the ultimate target of breath meditation as a Vipassana Meditation.

Not only breath meditation, all the other meditation types described under the Eight Fold Path in the Buddhist Teachings are guided to train the one's mind to reduce and eradicate the attachment or desire known as *THANHA*.. On the other way, a mind is to free from Lust, Anger, and Delusion which is the **FREEDOM OF MIND**.

Breath and Its Function within body and mind

We can technically observe how craving or desire arises with each breath through analyzing the function of the five aggregates (*Panca Skandha*) in relation to the breath. We can analyze the process of breathing step by step.

1. Initial thought or attention (*Manasikara*) arise with a mindfulness of an inhale.
2. Nostril (operate as a body or as one of six organs, incoming air touches the nostril) and an inhale (incoming air as an object) interconnect through the body consciousness functions at nostril (*Kaya Vinnana*).
3. Integration of the nostril, inhale and body consciousness at the nostril, the next thought arises as the contact (*Phassa*).
4. The contact escalates to the next thought as a perception (*Sanna*) where the mind identified the object as a breath or incoming air.
5. The perception gives sensation (*Vedana*), based on temperature differences between outer air and temperature at nostril and feeling of touch of outer air nostril. There are three types of sensation such as pleasant (*Sukha*), unpleasant (*Dukkha*) and neutral (*Upekkha*). Always breath renders a pleasant sensation.
6. The pleasant sensation escalates to a desire or craving to the inhale which is known as the mental formation (*Cetana*)

7. The craving escalates to the state of strong attachment to the inhale known as cling (*Upadana*).

8. The cling creates essential ingredients known as *Kaya Sankhara* which is a pre-condition for the becoming or existence of future life (*Bhava*) or the rebirth.

We can observe the same process for the exhale too.

The knowledge and understanding of this process of inhaling and exhaling will benefit in the insight meditation to observe the breath as a natural process in terms of impermanence, suffering, and no-self. By observing this reality, one can gradually begin to realize that the strong attachment to the breath is a useless exercise as an end of the life, everyone has to leave the breath and leave the body without life to nature. When we observe the breath in the meditation in this manner, our attachment to other world elements become negligible.

The Enlightened Person acquired such skill and knowledge known as the Wisdom to face last breath at the death or ultimate death (Parinibbana) without any attachment which is the cessation of the *Kaya Sankhara*.

Breath Meditation and Ego

Breath meditation brings you the realization of impermanence and selfless nature of your life. You will realize that there is no "I", "ME" or "MINE" within your body and mind. It is the mere illusory concept that we make ourselves known as EGO or CONCEIT (*Mana*). The lessening of ego feeling brings down the craving or *Tanha* that attached to the many things in the world. Lessening Craving (*Tanha*) further reduce the Clinging or *Upadana* (strong attachment or grasping) which is the major element that elongates the Wheel of Life (birth and death vicious circle) known as *SANSARA CAKKA*.

The ultimate objective of all Buddhists is to eliminate the Ten Fetters (*Dasa Sanyojana*) and to stop the continuation of birth and death vicious circle. In other words, this is known as the noble tranquility which is the Supreme Bliss of *Nibbana*. In Nibbana, nothing (body and mind) exist. The Ten Fetters are the defiled thoughts arising in a mind based on Lust, Anger, and Delusion. With the spiritual development acquired through the *Vipassana Bhavana* or the Insight Meditation, the Ten Fetters are gradually removed from the mind and acquire totally purified mind known as *ARAHATSHIP*.

Breath Meditation and Facing Last Breath

As mentioned above, desire and ego are the main fuels that function and elongate the Birth and Death vicious circle. More desire increases the momentum of the above circle. Through insight breath meditation (*Vipassana Bhavana*), you realize that the breath is the most desirous element that we do not want to leave away from even for a one second during our lifetime. The breath meditation gives us necessary training and insight how to face last breath and release it with proper consciousness at the death.

Factors hinder the meditation process

According to the Buddhist Teachings, there are five factors known as the Five Hindrance (*Panca Nivarana*) which retard the meditation process.

1.Sloth and Torpor (*Tina Middha*)

The heaviness of body and dullness brings laziness to the mind which hinder the mind to focus on an object. The breath is the object that is focused on the breath meditation. There should be a strong will, courage (*Viriya*) and determination in order to overcome this state of body and mind.

2.Doubt (*Vicikicca*)

Doubt is the lack of confidence or trust. If you start any activity with a doubt, it retards the progress or sometimes you will slow down or sometimes stop and never reach anticipated goals. Hence, you should build up and maintain strong confidence (*Saddha*) and courage throughout the meditation process in order to receive good results.

3.Ill-will (*Viyapada*)

Integration of sloth, torpor, and doubt create ill-will in a mind during the meditation. Once you eliminate above three qualities in the mind, the mind receives state known as happiness or joy (*Peethi*) which is opposite to ill-will. When you enjoy the meditation which becomes happiest activity in the world,

4.Restless and Remorse (*Uddacca Kukkucca*)

Restless and Remorse distract your mind and create frustration, stress, and sadness and worry in your mind for not achieving the anticipated level of tranquility or stillness in your mind during meditation. Sometimes you may frustrate thinking disappointed activities and happenings in your life.in the past. Therefore, it hinders the mind to keep and stay in the present moment and concentrate on meditation. The past does not come back and future does not arise yet. The mind has to keep in the present moment which is a unique moment to proceed in a life. That is meditation. Once you eliminate above three conditions of the mind, the mind receives a moment of tranquility (*Ekaggata*) which is the foundation or base to receives state of longer tranquility known as *Samadhi*. Eventually, you begin to realize the development of different stages of the meditative process now.

5.Sensual Desire (*Kamaccanda*)

The tranquility of a mind is an essential state or condition to observe the nature of a mind or the type thoughts which arise and pass away in a mind. The thoughts are subjected to impermanence (*Anicca*), and egolessness or selflessness (*Antta*) which leads to unsatisfactoriness (*Dukkha*), These are the realities that we experience in every moment of our lives. Once you observe these realities in the meditation, your sensual desire arose in your mind for non-permanent elements existing within your mind and body and also around you gradually begin to decrease. This is the path or methodology to acquire Freedom of Mind (*Nibbana*) from eradicating craving or desire (*Tanha*),

If your life is contented only with basic or minimum needs (minimalism) which are known as *Alpeccata*, your life becomes very simpler and easy to direct your mind toward happiness and stillness. Generally, we are tempted towards collecting a lot of unnecessary things around us to show social status or ego (*Mana*) to the world, thinking that those bring the happiness to the life. In reality, it does not happen the way everyone expects. The Insight Meditation or Right Mindfulness is the only way to correct this delusive ideas or attitudes which are known as Ignorance (*Moha or Avijja*)

GUIDING POINTS FOR INSIGHT BREATH MEDITATION (ANAPANASATI VIPASSANA BHAVANA)

1. I am the happiest person in the world. I get a lot of energy through breath for my existence.
2. I observe the breath for further stillness in my mind and body.
3. I enjoy the breath and how comfortable and peaceful I am in inhale and exhale
4. Observe breath as a short breath, as a long breath and observe it as a natural process. Don't give additional effort in breathing.
5. Observe how breath embraces the whole body. Observe how to inflate and deflate the body.
6. What I inhale is changing throughout process inside the body and exhale totally different breath.
7. Every breath has a beginning (attention on nostril for incoming air), continuity or changes in the air flow and physical formation of the tummy and whole body and an end (attention on nostril for outgoing air).
8. Observe breath itself as an impermanent element.
9. Observe the flow of thoughts attach to the breath are arising, changing in the process and passing away at the end.
10. Every breath changes not only body formation, it changes whole body chemistry and every cell of the body is constantly changing in the process. The whole body is impermanent.
11. A breath is a natural element. It is operated itself (No one has a control on it).
12. A breath is not belonging to me. There is no "I", "ME" or "MINE" in breath or within body and mind. It is a delusive concept.
13. Breath brings sickness, age and at the end suffering.
14. The breath is part of natural process. Let it goes at it is.
15. Craving for breath and attach (cling) to breath is a delusion.
16. The breath will detach and leave the body at any time. Everyone has to prepare for it. Breath Meditation is a training for such unexpected last moment of the life.

May you all be able to correct your views and doubts to lead the path for the SUPREME BLISS OF NIBBANA !!!

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