

## 16 Steps of Mindfulness of Breathing (*Ānāpānasati*) (MN 118)

<p>1. He knows clearly when he is breathing in a long breath, "I am breathing in a long breath," and he knows clearly when he is breathing out a long breath, "I am breathing out a long breath";</p> <p><i>(dīghaṃ vā assasanto 'dīghaṃ assasāmi'ti pajānāti, dīghaṃ vā passasanto 'dīghaṃ passasāmi'ti pajānāti)</i></p>	<p>It's essential to realize that the breath and the body are closely connected. In this first step, we focus on the long breath. We examine its properties, qualities, influence, and flavor, and study how it affects the body. We learn to make the breath long and keep it long, and observe how the body moves with each inhalation and exhalation. By studying the long breath exclusively, we become experts in all matters related to it. We also discover the close interconnection between the breath and the body, and how the long breath brings happiness and comfort.</p>
<p>2. He knows clearly when he is breathing in a short breath, "I am breathing in a short breath," and he knows clearly when he is breathing out a short breath, "I am breathing out a short breath."</p> <p><i>(rassaṃ vā assasanto 'rassaṃ assasāmi'ti pajānāti, rassaṃ vā passasanto 'rassaṃ passasāmi'ti pajānāti)</i></p>	<p>We need to observe and understand all aspects of the short breath, just as we did with the long breath. We'll notice that the short breath brings uneasiness and discomfort while the long breath brings ease and comfort. We can learn to regulate the breath to make the body either comfortable or uncomfortable. We should also pay attention to how the breath affects the body and mind, such as making the body cool or calm, or driving away anger by breathing long. We need to experience and understand the relationship and differences between the long and short breaths.</p>
<p>3. He trains himself, "I will breathe in experiencing the whole body," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out experiencing the whole body"</p> <p><i>(sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī<sup>1</sup> assasissāmi'ti sikkhati, 'sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmi'ti sikkhati)</i></p>	<p>We must understand that there are two bodies, the breath-body and the flesh-body, and that the breath-body conditions and nourishes the flesh-body. We must see how they condition each other and realize the interrelationship between them. This step also involves understanding the three meanings of the term "sankhara": conditioner, condition, and conditioning. By practicing step three, we can experience all three meanings together and regulate the flesh-body through the breath-body. Once we fully experience this fact with each in-breath and out-breath, we have succeeded in practicing step three.</p>
<p>4. He trains himself, "I will breathe in calming bodily formations," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out calming bodily formations."</p> <p><i>(passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmi'ti sikkhati, 'passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmi'ti sikkhati)</i></p>	<p>This step requires the use of five tricks or techniques, which are: following the breath, guarding the breath at a certain point, creating a mental image at the guarding point, manipulating the images, and selecting the appropriate image to concentrate on. The last trick leads to perfect concentration, or <i>ekaggata</i>, which is a state of one-pointedness, contentment, and joy. Although it is not necessary to reach <i>jhana</i>, the feelings of <i>pīti</i> and <i>sukha</i> are required to move on to step five.</p>
<p>5. He trains himself, "I will breathe in experiencing excitement," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out experiencing excitement"</p> <p><i>(pītipaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmi'ti sikkhati, 'pītipaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmi'ti sikkhati)</i></p>	<p>This involves experiencing <i>pīti</i>, which is characterized by stimulation and excitement rather than peace. The practitioner must observe the different levels and gradations of <i>pīti</i> and fully experience it with each breath. The next stage involves studying the flavor of <i>pīti</i>, including its heaviness, lightness, coarseness, and</p>

<sup>1</sup> **Sabba**: every; whole; entire + **kāya**: the body, the physical body; sometimes the material form (of a particular existence) as opposed to the mental faculties, sometimes the assemblage of all five khandhas. The body is the experiencer of sensation and feeling, either (a) generally (physically and/or mentally); or (b) specifically, as one of the organs of sense or perception + **paṭisaṃvedī**: one who feels; experiences; suffers; or enjoys.

	<p>subtlety, and understanding its influence on the mind and thoughts. The ultimate goal is to become familiar with the nature and secrets of <i>piti</i> and its relationship to the mind. It is important to note that while <i>piti</i> is stimulating, it is not as refined and subtle as <i>sukha</i>, which will be explored in the next step of the second tetrad.</p>
<p>6. He trains himself, "I will breathe in experiencing happiness," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out experiencing happiness"</p> <p>(<i>'sukhapaṇisaṃvedī assasissāmī'ti sikkhati,</i> <i>'sukhapaṇisaṃvedī passasissāmī'ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>We see happiness as the result of <i>piti</i> or excitement. When <i>piti</i> has done its job of exciting the mind, it loses energy and transforms into <i>sukha</i> or calmness. It's important to note that these two feelings are very different. While <i>piti</i> stimulates and excites, <i>sukha</i> soothes and calms. In step six, we focus on <i>sukha</i> as the agent that makes the mind tranquil. Normally, <i>piti</i> overshadows <i>sukha</i>, but when <i>piti</i> fades away, <i>sukha</i> remains. So with every breath, we taste the tranquil flavor of <i>sukha</i>.</p>
<p>7. He trains himself, "I will breathe in experiencing mental formations," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out experiencing mental formations"</p> <p>(<i>'cittasaṅkhārapaṇisaṃvedī assasissāmī'ti sikkhati,</i> <i>'cittasaṅkhārapaṇisaṃvedī passasissāmī'ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>Feelings like <i>piti</i> and <i>sukha</i> are mind-conditioners. When <i>piti</i> conditions the mind, both the mind and thoughts become coarse. But when <i>sukha</i> conditions it, both become subtle and tranquil. Both feelings condition the mind, but from different angles. These feelings are called "mind-conditioner" (<i>citta-sankhara</i>). When we breathe in and breathe out, we contemplate this fact in our mind. This is the practice of step seven.</p>
<p>8. He trains himself, "I will breathe in calming mental formations," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out calming mental formations."</p> <p>(<i>'passambhayaṃ cittasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmī'ti sikkhati,</i> <i>'passambhayaṃ cittasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmī'ti sikkhati.</i>)</p>	<p>Step eight involves calming the mind-conditioners while breathing in and out. We must first learn to calm our feelings before attempting to do so. With the <i>samadhi</i> method, we can calm <i>piti</i>'s impulse by developing a higher level of concentration or by changing our thoughts. The wisdom method involves using <i>panna</i> to understand the true nature of <i>piti</i> and how it arises and ceases. One approach is to see the attractive quality (<i>assada</i>) and wicked punishment (<i>adinava</i>) of <i>piti</i>, which will allow us to be freed from the power of things that constantly deceive and lure us into liking and disliking. By understanding and controlling both pleasant and unpleasant feelings, we become masters of our emotions and can use <i>panna</i> to drive them away.</p>
<p>9. He trains himself, "I will breathe in experiencing the mind," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out experiencing the mind"</p> <p>(<i>'cittapaṇisaṃvedī assasissāmī'ti sikkhati,</i> <i>'cittapaṇisaṃvedī passasissāmī'ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>Step one of the third tetrad is about experiencing and contemplating the different states of the mind. This includes observing whether there is greed, anger, or delusion present in the mind, and whether the mind is undistracted, in a better state of awareness than usual, in an unsurpassed state of final satisfaction, in full <i>samadhi</i>, and liberated from attachment. By observing these five different characteristics, we can gain a better understanding of ourselves and our habitual thought patterns. The goal is to understand our own mind thoroughly, and we can achieve this by practicing and observing the mind during each moment of our practice.</p>
<p>10. He trains himself, "I will breathe in gladdening the mind," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out gladdening the mind"</p> <p>(<i>'abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ assasissāmī'ti sikkhati,</i> <i>'abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmī'ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>Step two of this tetrad is about making the mind joyful and content. Once we have control over the mind, we can put it into any desirable state. Whenever the mind is sad or joyless, we can let go of the sorrow and bring the mind into a joyful state. This joyfulness can come from material or sensual things, but the kind we want to focus on is the joy of <i>Dhamma</i>. We can delight the mind by reflecting on achieving success in our <i>Dhamma</i> practice or by reflecting on the good things we have obtained in</p>

	life through the <i>Dhamma</i> . By doing this, we can be joyful and content, and it will help us in our <i>Dhamma</i> practice.
<p>11. He trains himself, "I will breathe in unifying the mind," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out unifying the mind."</p> <p>(<i>samādahaṃ cittaṃ assasissāmi'ti sikkhati</i>, '<i>samādahaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmi'ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>Step eleven is about unifying the mind, which means being able to put the mind into a state of focus or "samadhi" whenever we want or need. This step builds on the previous ones where we learned to control and calm the mind. Unifying the mind in practice and daily life allows us to get rid of unwanted feelings and be focused and happy, which helps us perform our duties skillfully. It's a common misconception that concentrating or unifying the mind means sitting still like a log without any sensation. Instead, a unified mind has three qualities: stability, purity, and activeness. These qualities can be present while walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, and are interdependent. A mind with these qualities is called "samahito" and is able to solve any problem and perform any duty. By having a unified mind, we can understand the true nature of things and see reality clearly.</p>
<p>12. He trains himself, "I will breathe in liberating the mind," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out liberating the mind."</p> <p>(<i>vimocayaṃ<sup>2</sup> cittaṃ assasissāmi'ti sikkhati</i>, '<i>vimocayaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmi'ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>Liberating the mind is the twelfth and final step in this tetrad. It means letting go of any attachments and having a spotlessly clean and free mind. There are four types of attachment, including material possessions, incorrect opinions, traditional activities, and things we attach to as "I" or "mine." We must observe and examine these attachments to see their lowly wickedness and the value of non-attachment. Additionally, we must get rid of any hindrances or defilements, such as feelings of sensuality, aversion, depression, and anger. By letting go of all attachments, we can eliminate <i>dukkha</i> and complete our study of the mind.</p>
<p>13. He trains himself, "I will breathe in contemplating impermanence," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out contemplating impermanence"</p> <p>(<i>aniccānupassī assasissāmi'ti sikkhati</i>, '<i>aniccānupassī passasissāmi'ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>The practice of <i>ānāpānasati</i> involves examining things that exist within us. To contemplate impermanence, we observe the changing nature of the breath, the body, and the feelings that arise. Realizing impermanence also leads to the realization of unsatisfactoriness, not-self, voidness, thusness, and conditionality<sup>3</sup>. Merely seeing impermanence alone is not enough; we must see impermanence in all its characteristics to fully realize its significance. The complete realization of impermanence leads to a deep understanding of the <i>sankhara</i> and is crucial for solving our problems.</p>
<p>14. He trains himself, "I will breathe in contemplating fading away of desire," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out contemplating fading away of desire"</p> <p>(<i>virāgānupassī assasissāmi'ti sikkhati</i>, '<i>virāgānupassī passasissāmi'ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>Realizing impermanence makes us tired and bored of the things we attach to, causing attachment to dissolve. Fading away is the second step of this process. We observe attachment dissolve like stains fading in the sunlight. As attachment lessens, our even-mindedness towards things we once attached to increases, resulting in non-attachment. We can observe this in the gradual fading of emotions like desire, anger, fear, and jealousy until the mind is still and silent without clinging or attachment. Practice contemplating impermanence until attachment dissolves and you can remain still, silent, and even-minded.</p>

<sup>2</sup> The word "vimocaya" is a Sanskrit term that can be translated as "liberation," "release," or "freedom." It refers to the state of being freed or released from suffering, bondage, or limitations.

<sup>3</sup> *Anicca* (transience), *dukkha* (unsatisfactoriness), *anattā* (not-self), *suññata* (voidness), *tathatā* (thusness), and *idippaccayatā* (conditionality) are six interrelated insights that lead from one to the next; thus the phrase *aniccānupassī* (contemplating impermanence) incorporates the realization of all six fundamental insights.

<p><b>15.</b> He trains himself, "I will breathe in contemplating cessation," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out contemplating cessation"</p> <p>(<i>‘nīrodhānupassī assasissāmī’ti sikkhati,</i> <i>‘nīrodhānupassī passasissāmī’ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>We observe the cessation of attachment and the non-existence of attachment while breathing in and out. There are many forms of <i>nīrodha</i>, but ultimately the goal is to end <i>dukkha</i>. The symptoms of <i>dukkha</i> are pain and sorrow; wants and desires toward agreeable and disagreeable things; and regarding any of the five aggregates (<i>khandha</i>) as "self." When these aspects are quenched, then <i>dukkha</i> is quenched. We experience the absence of attachment while breathing in and out and taste the flavor of <i>nibbana</i>, which is synonymous with <i>nīrodha</i>. Contemplating the quenching of attachment is contemplating <i>nibbana</i>.</p>
<p><b>16.</b> He trains himself, "I will breathe in contemplating relinquishment," and he trains himself, "I will breathe out contemplating relinquishment."</p> <p>(<i>‘paṇinissaggānupassī assasissāmī’ti sikkhati,</i> <i>‘paṇinissaggānupassī passasissāmī’ti sikkhati</i>)</p>	<p>The final step is called "throwing it all back." We contemplate returning everything we once attached to back to nature, from where they came. We use the metaphor of being thieves who have taken natural things and claimed them as our own, causing ourselves suffering. We need to let go of these attachments and return them to nature. We can also use the metaphor of carrying heavy burdens that weigh us down, causing us suffering. We need to toss these burdens away to be free and above the world. This step leads to emancipation, liberation, salvation, deliverance, or release from suffering. It's the best thing humans can achieve.</p>