

Mindfulness:  
The Path to the  
Deathless

The Meditation Teaching of  
Venerable Ajahn Sumedho



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## **The Path to the Deathless**

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# Introduction

The aim of this book is to provide a clear instruction in and reflection on Buddhist meditation as taught by Ajahn Sumedho, a bhikkhu (monk) of the Theravadin tradition. The following chapters are edited from longer talks Ajahn Sumedho has given to meditators as a practical approach to the wisdom of Buddhism. This wisdom is otherwise known as Dhamma, or 'the way things are.'

You are invited to use this book as a step-by-step manual. The first chapter tries to make the practice of meditation clear in a general way and the subsequent sections can be taken one at a time and followed by a period of meditation. The third chapter is a reflection on the understanding that meditation develops. The book concludes with the means of taking the Refuges and Precepts which place the practice of meditation within the larger framework of mind-cultivation. These can be requested formally from ordained Buddhists (Sangha) or personally determined. They form the foundation of the means whereby spiritual values are brought into the world.

The first edition of this book (2,000 copies) was printed in 1985 for the opening of the Amaravati Buddhist Centre - and stocks were quickly exhausted. People appreciated the book, and some asked to help sponsor a re-print; so we gave the manuscript a more thorough proof-reading than had been possible before, and added some design to improve the 'feel' of the book - otherwise the text is the same.

This ebook edition, is the latest publication which has been re-formatted to view on ebook applications, published in 2016.

As this book is entirely produced by voluntary contributions and acts of service to the Dhamma, readers are asked to respect this offering and make it freely available.

May all beings realise Truth.

Venerable Sucitto

Amaravati Buddhist Centre

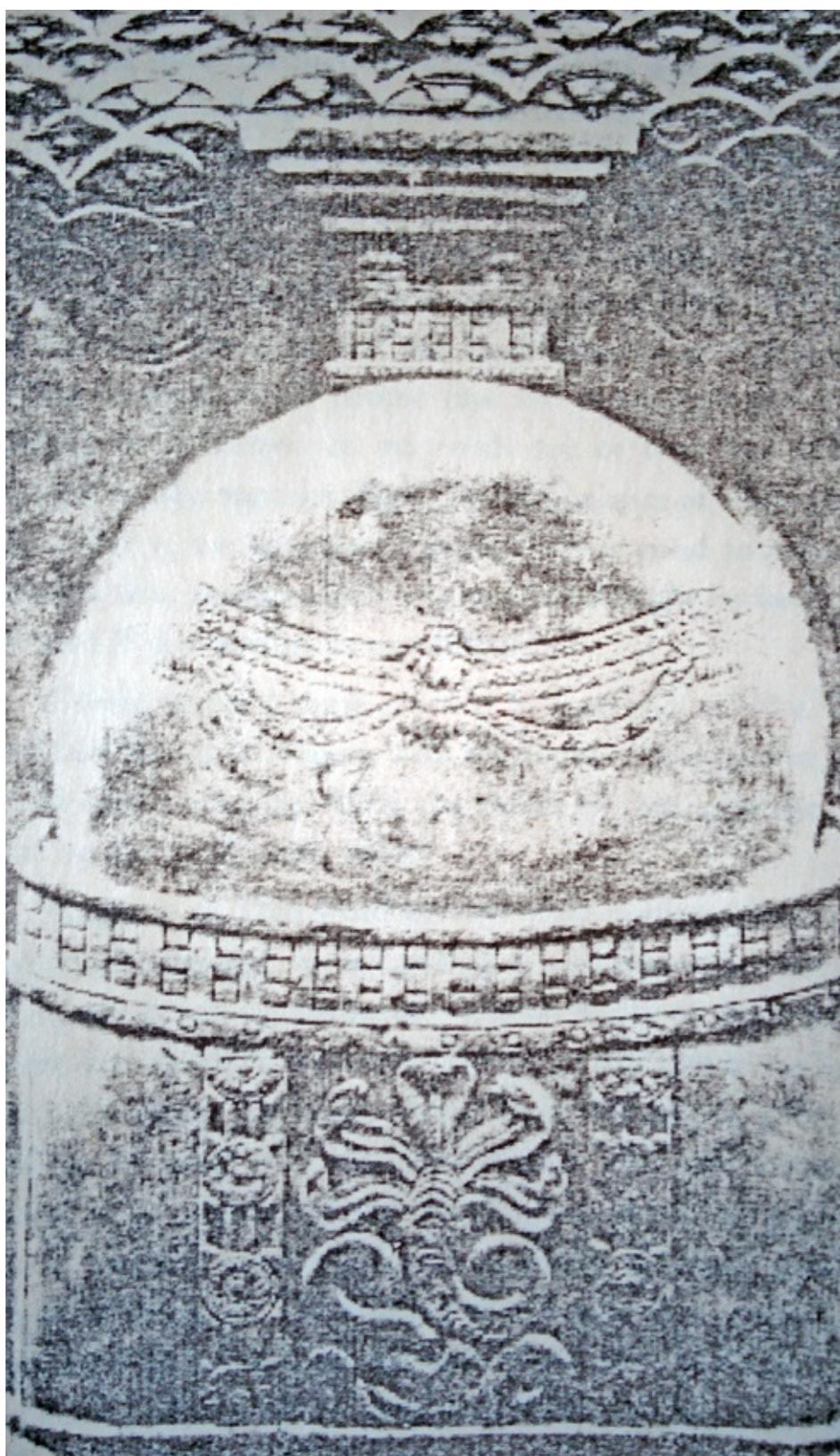
May 1986

## **A note before you begin**

Most of these instructions can be carried out whether sitting, standing or walking. However, the technique of mindfulness of breathing (ānāpānasati) mentioned in the first few chapters is generally used with a sitting posture as it is improved by a still and settled physical state. For this state the emphasis is on sitting in such a way that the spine is erect, but not stressed, with the neck in line with the spine and the head balanced so that it does not droop forward. Many people find the crosslegged 'lotus' posture (sitting on a cushion or mat with one or both feet placed sole upward on the opposite thigh) an ideal balance of effort and stability after a few months of practice. It is good to train oneself towards this, gently, a little at a time. A straight-backed chair can be used if this posture is too difficult.

Having attained some physical balance and stability, the arms and face should be relaxed, with the hands resting, one in the palm of the other, in the lap. Allow the eyelids to close, relax the mind .... take up the meditation object.

'Jongrom' (a Thai word derived from *cankama* from pali, the scriptural language) means pacing to and fro on a straight path. The path should be measured ideally twenty to thirty paces between two clearly recognisable objects, so that one is not having to count the steps. The hands should be lightly clasped in front of or behind the body with the arms relaxed. The gaze should be directed in an unfocussed way on the path about ten paces ahead not to observe anything, but to maintain the most comfortable angle for the neck. The walking then begins in a composed manner, and when one reaches the end of the path, one stands still for the period of a breath or two, mindfully turns around, and mind fully walks back again.



# Investigation

## What is Meditation?

The word meditation is a much used word these days, covering a wide range of practices. In Buddhism it designates two kinds of meditation - one is called 'samatha', the other 'vipassana.' Samatha meditation is one of concentrating the mind on an object, rather than letting it wander off to other things. One chooses an object such as the sensation of breathing, and puts full attention on the sensations of the inhalation and exhalation. Eventually through this practice you begin to experience a calm mind - and you become tranquil because you are cutting off all other impingements that come through the senses.

The objects that you use for tranquillity are tranquillising (needless to say!). If you want to have an excited mind, then go to something that is exciting, don't go to a Buddhist monastery, go to a disco!... Excitement is easy to concentrate on, isn't it? It's so strong a vibration that it just pulls you right into it. You go to the cinema and if it is really an exciting film, you become enthralled by it. You don't have to exert any effort to watch something that is very exciting or romantic or adventurous. But if you are not used to it, watching a tranquillising object can be terribly boring. What is more boring than watching your breath if you are used to more exciting things? So for this kind of ability, you have to arouse effort from your mind, because the breath is not interesting, not romantic, not adventurous or scintillating - it is, just as it is. So you have to arouse effort because you're not getting stimulated from outside.

In this meditation, you are not trying to create any image, but just to concentrate on the ordinary feeling of your body as it is right now to sustain and hold your attention on your breathing. When you do that, the breath becomes more and more refined, and you calm down... I know people who have prescribed samatha meditation for high blood pressure because it calms the heart.

So this is tranquillity practice. You can choose different objects to concentrate on, training yourself to sustain your attention till you absorb or become one with the object. You actually feel a sense of oneness with the object you have been concentrating on, and this is what we call absorption.

The other practice is 'vipassanā' or 'insight meditation.' With insight meditation you are opening the mind up to everything. You are not choosing any particular object to concentrate on or absorb into, but watching in order to understand the way things are. Now what we can see about the way things are, is that all sensory experience is impermanent. Everything you see, hear, smell, taste, touch; all mental conditions your feelings, memories and thoughts - are changing conditions of the mind, which arise and pass away. In vipassanā, we take this characteristic of impermanence (or change) as a way of looking at all sensory experience that we can observe while sitting here.

This is not just a philosophical attitude or a belief in a particular Buddhist theory: impermanence is to be insightfully known by opening the mind to watch, and being aware of the way things are. It's not a matter of analysing things by assuming that things should be a certain way and, when they aren't, then trying to figure out why things are not the way we think they should be. With insight practice, we are not trying to analyse ourselves or even trying to change anything to fit our desires. In this practice we just patiently observe that whatever arises passes away, whether it is mental or physical.

So this includes the sense organs themselves, the object of the senses, and the consciousness that arises with their contact. There are also mental conditions of liking or disliking what we see, smell, taste, feel or touch; the names we give them; and the ideas, words and concepts we create around sensory experience. Much of our life is based on wrong assumptions made through not understanding and not really investigating the way anything is. So life for one who isn't awake and aware tends to become depressing or be wildering, especially when disappointments or tragedies occur. Then one becomes overwhelmed because one has not observed the way things are.

In Buddhist terms we use the word Dhamma, or Dharma, which means 'the way it is', 'the natural laws.' When we observe and 'practise the Dhamma, we open our mind to the way things are. In this way we are no longer blindly reacting to the sensory experience, but understanding it, and through the comprehension beginning to let go of it. We begin to free ourselves from just being overwhelmed or blinded and deluded by the appearance of things. Now to be aware and awake is not a matter of becoming that way, but of being that way. So we observe the way it is right now, rather than doing something now to become aware in the future. We observe the body as it is, sitting here. It all belongs to nature, doesn't it?. The human body belongs to the earth, it needs to be sustained by the things that come out of the earth. You cannot live on just air or try to import food from Mars and Venus. You have to eat the things that live and grow on this Earth. When the body dies, it goes back to the earth, it rots and decays and becomes one with the earth again. It follows the laws of nature, of creation and destruction, of being born and then dying. Anything that is born doesn't stay permanently in one state, it grows up, gets old and then dies. All things in nature, even the universe itself, have their spans of existence, birth and death, beginning and ending. All that we perceive and can conceive of is change; it is impermanent. So it can never permanently satisfy you.

In Dhamma practice, we also observe this unsatisfactoriness of Sensory experience. Now just note in your own life that when you expect to be satisfied from sensory objects or experiences you can only be temporarily satisfied, gratified maybe, momentarily happy - and then it changes. This is because there is no point in sensory consciousness that has a permanent quality or essence. So the sense experience is always a changing one, and out of ignorance and not understanding, we tend to expect a lot from it. We tend to demand, hope and create all kinds of things, only to feel terribly disappointed, despairing, sorrowful and frightened. Those very expectations and hopes take us to despair, anguish, sorrow and grief, lamentation, old age, sickness and death.

Now this is a way of examining sensory consciousness. The mind can think in abstractions, it can create all kinds of ideas and images, it can make things very refined or very coarse. There is a whole gamut of possibilities from very refined states of blissful happiness and ecstasies to very coarse painful miseries: from Heaven to Hell, and no permanent Heaven, in fact no permanent state that can be perceived or conceived of. In our meditation, once we begin to realise the limitations, the unsatisfactoriness, the changing nature of all sensory experience, we also begin to realise it is not me or mine, it is 'anatta' not self.

So, realising this, we begin to free ourselves from identification with the sensory conditions. Now this is done not through aversion to them, but through understanding them as they are. It is a truth to be realised, not a belief. 'Anatta' is not a Buddhist belief but an actual realisation. Now if you don't spend any time in your life trying to investigate and understand it, you will probably live your whole life on the assumption that you are your body! Even though you might at some moment think, "Oh, I am not the body", you read some kind of inspired poetry or some new philosophical angle. You

might think it is a good idea that one isn't the body, but you haven't really *realised* that. Even though some people, intellectuals and so forth, will say, "We are not the body, is not self", that is easy to say, but to really know that is something else. Through this practice of meditation, through the investigation and understanding of the way things are, we begin to free ourselves from attachment. When we no longer expect or demand, then of course we don't feel the resulting despair and sorrow and grief when we don't get what we want. So this is the goal "Nibbana", or realisation of non-grasping of any phenomena that have a beginning and an ending. When we let go of this insidious and habitual attachment to what is born and dies, we begin to realise the Deathless.

Some people just live their lives reacting to life because they have been conditioned to do so, like pavlovian dogs. If you are not awakened to the way things are, then you really are merely a conditioned intelligent creature rather than a conditioned stupid dog. You may look down on Pavlov's dogs that salivate when the bell rings, but notice how we do very similar things. This is because with sensory experience it is all conditioning, it is not a person, it is no 'soul' or 'personal essence.' These bodies, feelings, memories and thoughts are perceptions conditioned into the mind through pain, through having been born as a human being, being born into the families we have, and the class, race, nationality; dependent on whether we have a male or female body, attractive or unattractive, and so forth. All these are just the conditions that are not ours, not me, not mine. These conditions, they follow the laws of nature, the natural laws, We cannot say, "I don't want my body to get old" well, we can say that, but no matter how insistent we are, the body still gets old. We cannot expect the body to never feel pain or get ill or always have perfect vision and hearing. We hope, don't We? "I hope I will always be healthy, I will never become an invalid and I will always have good eyesight, never become blind; have good ears so I will never be one of those old people that others have to yell at; and that I will never get senile and always have control of my faculties' till I die at ninety-five, fully alert, bright, cheerful, and die just in my sleep without any pain." That is how we would all like it. Some of us might hold up for a long time and die in an idyllic way, tomorrow all our eyeballs might fall out. It is unlikely, but it could happen! However, the burden of life diminishes considerably when we reflect on the limitations of our life. Then we know what we can achieve, what we can learn from life, So much human misery comes out of expecting a lot and never quite being able to get everything one has hoped for.

So in our meditation and insightful understanding of the way things are, we see that beauty, refinement, pleasure are impermanent conditions - as well as pain, misery and ugliness. If you really understand that, then you can enjoy and endure whatever happens to you. Actually, much of the lesson in life is learning to endure what we don't like in ourselves and in the world around us; being able to be patient and kindly, and not make a scene over the imperfections in the sensory experience. We can adapt and endure and accept the changing characteristics of the sensory birth and death cycle by letting go and no longer attaching to it. When we free ourselves from identity with it, we experience our true nature, which is bright, clear, knowing; but is not a personal thing any more, it is not 'me' or 'mine' there is no attainment or attachment to it. We can only attach to that which is not ourself.

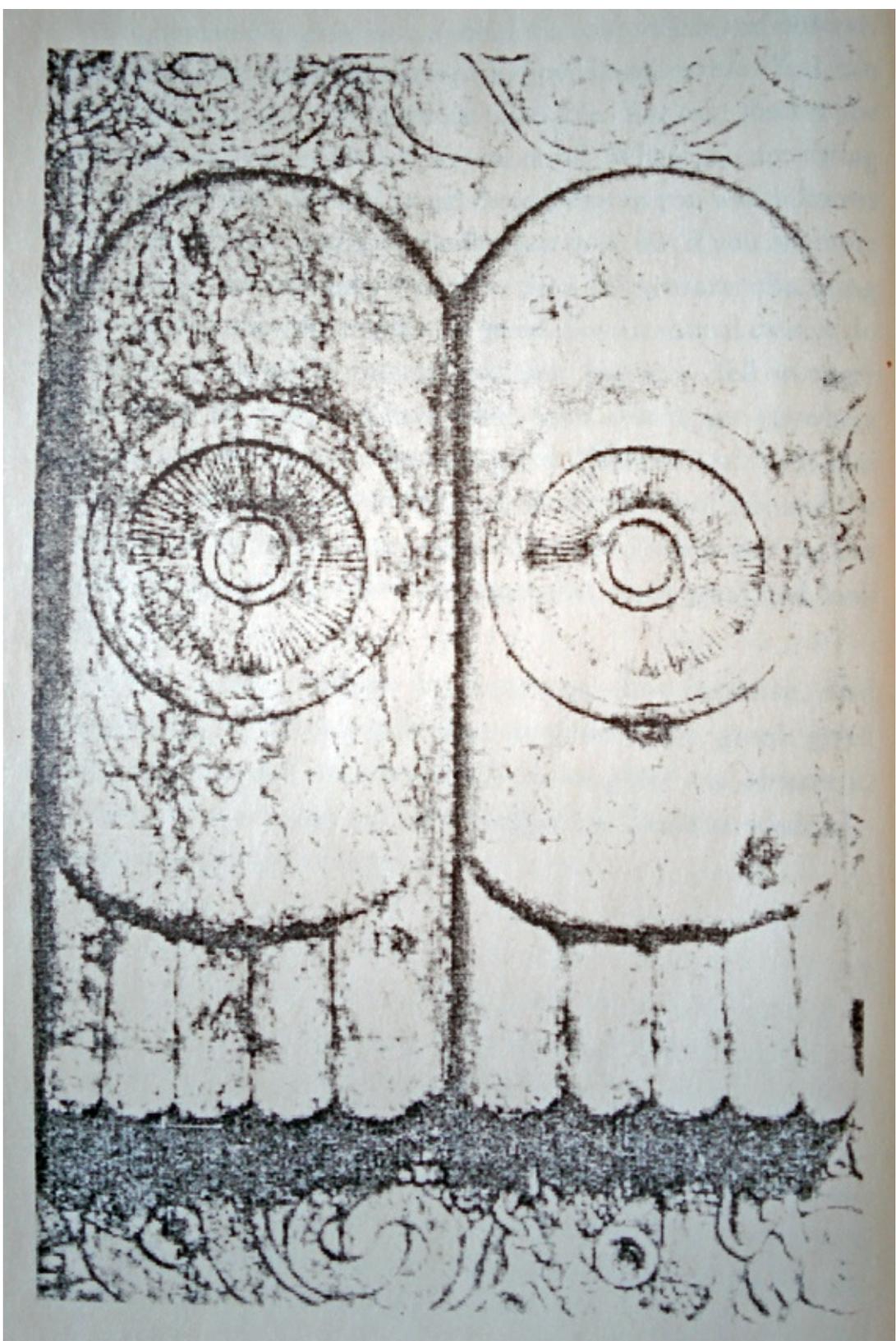
The Buddha's teachings are merely helpful means, ways of looking at sensory experience that help us to understand it. They are not commandments, they are not religious dogmas that we have to accept or believe in. They are merely guides to point to the way things are. So we are not using the Buddha's teachings to grasp them as an end in themselves, but only to remind ourselves to be awake, alert and aware that all that arises passes away.

This is a continuous, constant observation and reflection on the sensory world, because the sensory world has a powerfully strong influence. Having a body like this with the society we live in, the pressures on all of us are fantastic. Everything moves so quickly, television and the technology of the age, the cars everything tends to move at a very fast pace. It is all very attractive, exciting and interesting, and it all pulls your senses out. Just notice when you go to London how all the advertisements pull your attention out to whiskey bottles and cigarettes! Your attention is pulled into things you can buy, always going towards rebirth into sensory experience. The materialistic society tries to arouse greed so you will spend your money, and yet never be contented with what you have. There is always something better, something newer, something more delicious than what was the most delicious yesterday... it goes on and on and on, pulling you out into objects of the senses like that.

But when we come into the shrine room, we are not here to look at each other or to be attracted or pulled into any of the objects in the room, but to use them for reminding ourselves. We are reminded to either concentrate our minds on a peaceful object, or open the mind, investigate and reflect on the way things are. We have to experience this, each one for ourselves. No one's enlightenment is going to enlighten any of the rest of us. So this is a movement inwards: not looking outwards for somebody who is enlightened to make you enlightened. We give this opportunity for encouragement and guidance so that those of you who are interested in doing this can do so. Here you can, most of the time, be sure that nobody is going to snatch your purse! These days you can't count on anything, but there is less risk of it here than if you were sitting in Piccadilly Circus; Buddhist monasteries are refuges for this kind of opening of the mind. This is our opportunity as human beings.

As a human being we have a mind that can reflect and observe You can observe whether you are happy or miserable. You can observe the anger or jealousy or confusion in you mind. When you are sitting and feel really confused and upset, there is that in you which knows it. You might hate it and just blindly react to it, but if you are more patient you can observe that this is a temporary changing: condition of confusion or anger or greed. But an animal cannot do that; when it is angry it is completely that, lost in it. Tell an angry cat to watch its anger! . I have never been able to get anywhere with our cat, she cannot reflect on greed. But I can, and I am sure that the rest of you can. I see delicious food in front of me, and the movement in the mind is the same as our cat Doris's. But we can observe the animal attraction to things that smell good and look good.

This is using wisdom by watching that impulse, and understanding it. That which observes greed is not greed: greed cannot observe itself, but that which is not greed can observe it. This observing is what we call 'Buddha' or 'Buddha wisdom' - awareness of the way things are.



# Instruction

## Watching the Breath (Anāpānasati)

Anāpānasati \* is a way of concentrating your mind on your breath, so whether you are an expert at it already or whether you have given it up as a lost cause, there is always a time to watch the breath. This is an opportunity for developing 'samadhi' (concentration) through mustering all your attention just on the sensation of breathing. So at this time use your full commitment to that one point for the length of an inhalation, and the length of an exhalation. You are not trying to do it for, say, fifteen minutes, because you would never succeed at that, if that were your designated span of time for one-pointed concentration. So use this span of an inhalation and an exhalation.

Now the success of this depends on your patience rather than on your will-power, because the mind does wander and we always have to patiently go back to the breath. When we're aware that the mind wanders off, we note what it is: it may be because we tend to just put in a lot of energy at first and then not sustain it, making too much effort without sustaining power. So we are using the length of an inhalation and the length of an exhalation in order to limit the effort to just this length of time within which to sustain attention, put forth effort at the beginning of the exhalation to sustain it through that, through the exhalation to the end, and then again with the inhalation. Eventually it becomes even, and one is said to have 'samadhi' when it seems effortless.

At first it seems like a lot of effort, or that we can't do it, because we aren't used to doing this. Most minds have been trained to use associative thought. The mind has been trained by reading books and the like, to go from one word to the next, to have thoughts and concepts based on logic and reason. However, ānāpānasati is a different kind of training, where the object that we're concentrating on is so simple that it's not at all interesting on the intellectual level. So it's not a matter of being interested in it, but of putting forth effort and using this natural function of the body as a point of concentration. The body breathes whether one is aware of it or not. It's not like pranayama, where we're developing power through the breath, but rather developing samādhi concentration and mindfulness through observing the breath, the normal breath, as it is right now. As with anything, this is something that we have to practise to be able to do; nobody has any problem understanding the theory, it's in the continuous practice of it that people feel discouraged.

But note that very discouragement that comes from not being able to get the result that you want, because *that's* the hindrance to the practice. Note that very feeling, recognise that, and then let it go. Go back to the breath again. Be aware of that point where you get fed up or feel aversion or impatience with it, recognise it then let it go and go back to the breath again.

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\* Anāpānasati: literally, 'mindfulness' (sari) of the in and out breath.

## The Mantra 'Buddho'

If you've got a really active thinking mind, you may find the mantra<sup>1</sup> 'Buddho' helpful. Inhale on 'Bud' and exhale on 'dha' so you're actually thinking this for each inhalation. This is a way of sustaining concentration: so for the next fifteen minutes, do the ānāpānasati, putting all your attention, composing your mind with the mantric sound, 'Bud-dho'. Learn to train the mind to that point of clarity and brightness rather than just sinking into passivity. It requires sustained effort: one inhalation of 'Bud' -fully bright and clear in your mind, the thought itself raised and bright from the beginning to the end of the inhalation, and 'dha' on the exhalation. Let everything else go at this time. The occasion has arisen now to do just this you can solve your problems and the world's problems afterwards. At this time this much is all the occasion calls for. Bring the mantra up into consciousness. Make the mantra fully conscious instead of just a perfunctory passive thing that makes the mind dull; energise the mind so that the inhalation on 'Bud' is a bright inhalation, not just a perfunctory 'Bud' sound that fades out because it never gets brightened or refreshed by your mind. You can visualize the spelling so that you're fully with that syllable for the length of an inhalation, from the beginning to the end. Then -'dho' on the exhalation is performed the same way so that there's a continuity of effort rather than sporadic leaps-and -starts and failures.

Just notice if you have any obsessive thoughts that are coming up - some silly phrase that might be going through your mind. Now if you just sink into a passive state, then obsessive thoughts will take over. But learning to understand how the mind works and how to use it skilfully, you're taking this particular thought, the concept of 'Buddho' (the Buddha, the One Who Knows), and you're holding it in the mind as a thought. Not just as an obsessive, habitual thought, but as a skilful use of thought, using it to sustain concentration for the length of one inhalation, exhalation, for fifteen minutes.

The practice is that, no matter how many times you fail and your mind starts wandering, you simply note that you're distracted, or that you're thinking about it, or you'd rather not bother with 'Buddho' - "I don't want to do that. I'd rather just sit here and relax and not have to put forth any effort. Don't feel like doing it". Or maybe you've got other things on your mind at this time, creeping in at the edges of consciousness so you note that. Note what mood there is in your mind right now not to be critical or discouraged, but just calmly, coolly notice, if you're calmed by it, or if you feel dull or sleepy; if you've been thinking all this time or if you've been concentrating. Just to know.

The obstacle to concentration practice is aversion to failure and the incredible desire to succeed. Practice is not a matter of willpower, but of wisdom, of noting wisdom. With this practice, you can learn where your weaknesses are, where you tend to get lost. You witness the kind of character traits you've developed in your life so far, not to be critical of them but just to know how to work with them and not be enslaved by them. This means a careful, wise reflection on the way things are. So rather than avoiding them at all costs, even the ugliest messes are observed and recognised. That's an enduring quality. Nibbana<sup>2</sup> is often described as being 'cool.' Sounds like hip talk, doesn't it? But there's a certain significance to that word. Coolness to what? It tends to be refreshing, not caught up in passions but detached, alert and balanced.

The word 'Buddho' is a word that you can develop in your life as something to fill the mind with rather than with worries and all kinds of unskilful habits. Take the word, look at it, listen to it: 'Buddho'! It means the one who knows, the Buddha, the awakened, that which is awake. You can

visualise it in your mind. Listen to what your mind says - blah, blah, blah, etc. It goes on like this, an endless kind of excrement of repressed fears and aversions. So, now, we are recognising that. We're not using 'Buddho' as a club to annihilate or repress things, but as a skilful means. We can use the finest tools for killing and for harming others, can't we? You can take the most beautiful Buddha rupa and bash somebody over the head with it if you want! That's not what we call 'Buddhanussati', Reflection on the Buddha, is it? But we might do that with the word 'Buddho' as a way of suppressing those thoughts or feelings. That's an unskilful use of it. Remember we're not here to annihilate but to allow things to fade out. This is a gentle practice of patiently imposing 'Buddho' over the thinking, not out of exasperation, but in a firm and deliberate way.

The world needs to learn how to do this, doesn't it? the U.S. and the Soviet Union rather than taking machine guns and nuclear weapons and annihilating things that get in the way; or saying awful nasty things to each other. Even in our lives we do that, don't we? How many of you have said nasty things to someone else recently, wounding things, unkind barbed criticism, just because they annoy you, get in your way, or frighten you? So we practise just this with the little nasty annoying things in our own mind, the things which are foolish and stupid. We use 'Buddho', not as a club but as a skilful means of allowing it to go, to let go of it. Now for the next fifteen minutes, go back to your noses, with the mantra 'Buddho'. See how to use it and work with it.

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1. mantra: a word of religious significance, the repetition of which is a meditation device.
2. Nibbāna: Peace through non-attachment, otherwise spelt 'Nirvāna.'

## Effort and Relaxation

Effort is simply doing what you have to do. It varies according to people's characters and habits. Some people have a lot of energy so much so that they are always on the go, looking for things to do. You see them trying to find things to do, all the time, putting everything into the external. In meditation, we're not seeking anything to do, as an escape, but we are developing the internal kind of effort. We observe the mind, and concentrate on the subject.

If you make too much effort, you just become restless and if you don't put enough effort in, you become dull and the body begins to slump. Your body is a good measure of effort: you make the body straight, you can fill the body with effort; align the body, pull up your chest, keep your spine straight. It takes a lot of will-power, so your body is a good thing to watch for effort. If you're slack you just find the easiest posture the force of gravity pulls you down. When the weather is cold, you have to put energy up through the spine so that you're filling your body out, rather than huddling under blankets.

With ānāpānasati, 'mindfulness of breathing,' you are concentrating on the rhythm. I found it most helpful for learning to slow down rather than doing everything quickly - like thinking - you're concentrating on a rhythm that is much slower than your thoughts. But ānāpānasati requires you to slow down, it has a gentle rhythm to it. So we stop thinking: we are content with one inhalation, one exhalation taking all the time in the world, just to be with one inhalation, from the beginning to the middle and end.

If you're trying to get samādhi (concentration) from ānāpānasati, then you have already set a goal for yourself - you're doing this in order to get something for yourself, so ānāpānasati becomes a very frustrating experience, you become angry with it. Can you stay with just one inhalation? To be content with just one exhalation? To be content with just the simple little span you have to slow down, don't you?

When you're aiming to get jhāna (absorption) from this meditation and you're really putting a lot of effort into it, you are not slowing down, you're trying to get something out of it, trying to achieve and attain rather than humbly being content with one breath. The success of ānāpānasati is just that much mindful for the length of one inhalation, for the length of one exhalation. Establish your attention at the beginning and the end or beginning, middle and end. This gives you some definite points for reflection, so that if your mind wanders a lot during the practice, you pay special attention, scrutinising the beginning, the middle and the end. If you don't do this then the mind will tend to wander.

All our effort goes into just that; everything else is suppressed during that time, or discarded. Reflect on the difference between inhalation and exhalation examine it. Which do you like best? Sometimes the breathing will seem to disappear; it becomes very fine. The body seems to be breathing by itself and you get this strange feeling that you're not going to breathe. It's a bit frightening.

But this is an exercise; you centre on the breathing, without trying to control it at all. Sometimes when you are concentrating on the nostrils, you feel that the whole body is breathing. The body keeps breathing, all on its own. Sometimes we get too serious about everything - totally lacking in joy and happiness, no sense of humour; we just repress everything. So gladden the mind, be relaxed and at

ease, taking all the time in the world, without the pressure of having to achieve anything important: nothing special, nothing to attain, no big deal. It's just a little thing; even when you have only one mindful inhalation during the morning, that is better than what most people are doing - surely it is better than being heedless the whole time.

If you're a really negative person then try to be someone who is kinder and more self-accepting. Just relax and don't make meditation into a burdensome task for yourself. See it as an opportunity to be peaceful and at ease with the moment. Relax your body and be at peace.

You're not battling with the forces of evil. If you feel averse towards ānāpānasati, then note that, too. Don't feel that it is something you have to do, but see it as a pleasure, as something you really enjoy doing. You don't have to do anything else, you can just be completely relaxed. You've got all you need, you've got your breathing, you just have to sit here, there is nothing difficult to do, you need no special abilities, you don't even need to be particularly intelligent. When you think, "I can't do it," then just recognise that as resistance, fear or frustration and then relax.

If you find yourself getting all tense and up tight about ānāpānasati, then stop doing it. Don't make it into a difficult thing, don't make it into a burdensome task. If you can't do it, then just sit. When I used to get in terrible states, then I would just contemplate 'peace'. I would start to think, "I've got to.... I've got to do this." Then I'd think, "Just be at peace, relax."

Doubts and restlessness, discontent, aversion - Soon I was able to reflect on peace, saying the word over and over, hypnotising myself, "Relax, relax." The self doubts would start coming, "I'm getting nowhere with this, it's useless, I want to get something.' Soon I was able to be peaceful with that. You can calm down and when you relax, you can do ānāpānasati. If you want something to do, then do that.

At first, the practice can get very boring; you feel hopelessly clumsy like when you are learning to play the guitar. When you first start playing, your fingers are so clumsy, it seems hopeless, but once you have done so for some time, you gain skill and it's quite easy. You're learning to witness to what is going on in your mind, so you can know when you're getting restless and tense, averse to everything you recognise that, you're not trying to convince yourself that it is otherwise. You're fully aware of the way things are: what do you do when you're up-tight, tense and nervous? You relax.

In my first years with Ajahn Chah, I used to be very serious about meditation sometimes, I really got much too grim and solemn about myself. I would lose all sense of humour and just get DEAD SERIOUS, all dried up like an old twig. I would put forth a lot of effort, but it would be so strung up and unpleasant, thinking, "I've got to... I'm too lazy". I felt such terrible guilt if I wasn't meditating all the time - a grim, joyless state of mind. So I watched that, meditating on myself as a dried stick. When the whole thing was totally unpleasant, I would just remember the opposites, "You don't have to do anything. Nowhere to go, nothing to do. Be peaceful with the way things are now, relax, let go." I'd use that.

When your mind gets into this condition, apply the opposite, learn to take things easy. You read books about not putting any effort into things "just let it happen in a natural way" and you think, "All I have to do is lounge about." Then you usually lapse into a dull, passive state. But that is the time when you need to put forth a bit more effort.

With ānāpānasati, you can sustain effort for one inhalation. And if you can't sustain it for one

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