



Open Minds. Open Hearts. Open Hands.

# Shoonya Spaces

Space for Seekers of Truth.

**Mindfulness of Breath Meditation**

or

**Anapanasati**

by

**Jinarakshita**

There are many different styles of the Anapanasati (or mindfulness of breathing) meditation. The particular style described here has a long history, and a description of it can, for example, be found in the 5<sup>th</sup> century text , the Vissidhimagga. A brief outline of the practice is given

below, followed by some suggestions for working in meditation.

## **The Four Stage Anapanasati Practice**

General Instructions: The meditation is divided into four stages. The length of each stage could be a few minutes to start with, and then gradually increasing as one gets more experienced until each stage is at least ten minutes long. Ideally one goes from one stage to the next only when one feels that one can naturally move to the next stage.

*In all stages we keep our awareness on the breath. The awareness should be gentle but continuous. The breath itself is not to be controlled in anyway. We just keep aware of the breath, the physical feeling of the air entering the body, the movements of the body as the air comes in and out etc. If the breath is slow, we are just aware that it is slow. If it is fast we are just aware that it is fast. Whatever it is, we just let it be and don't try to control it.*

First Stage: Counting breaths after exhalation: In the first stage one counts at the end of the exhalation. After the first exhalation comes to a complete end silently count "one" . After the end of the second exhalation second count "two", and so on, until you reach *ten*. Then restart once again at one. If you get distracted and forget which number you are at, just start again at one.

Second Stage: Counting breaths before inhalation:The second stage is similar to the first stage, except that one counts just before the inhalation starts. Just before the first inhalation starts count "one". Just before the second count "two" and so on until ten. Then start again from one. As for the first stage, if you get distracted and forget which number you are at, just start again at one.

*Third Stage: Being aware of breath as it arises and passes away:* In the third stage there is no counting. Instead one tries to stay aware of the entire body of the breath, as it arises and it passes away. For example, one could be aware of the movement of the stomach as it rises and falls. Or one could follow the breath as it flows into the body and then out again.

*Fourth Stage: Being aware of sensation of the breath as it comes in contact with the nostrils:* In the fourth stage, one stays aware of the sensation of the breath as it comes into contact with the nostrils. At some point in the nostrils one will be able to feel the contact of the air as it comes in from the outside as well as the contact as it goes out again. One stays aware of this sensation. A traditional simile is that this is like a carpenter sawing a wood piece. The saw goes back and forth, but the carpenter keeps his awareness on the point of contact between the saw and the wood.

### **Suggestions for Practice**

We can regard doing meditation like trying to grow a delicate plant. You can't compel the plant to grow by sheer force of will. What one has to do is to patiently try to create the right conditions for the plant to grow. Similarly *our effort is on creating the conditions for meditation to arise.*

One needs to have a patient and kind approach to the meditation. If one's mind wanders, one has to patiently bring it back to the breath. Regardless of how many times the mind wanders, one should try to avoid getting frustrated, irritated or angry. Instead one should try to be kind to oneself, and just patiently bring the awareness back to the breath.

It is easy to fall into a pattern where we keep count of the breath with one part of our mind, but the rest of our mind is busy with its own thoughts and distractions. This is not the aim of the practice. *The aim is to completely fill our mind with the awareness of the breath.*

### **Some Context for the meditation**

We can regard this meditation as an exercise in integration. *We are trying to bring our entire being together into the meditation.* There are

several tendencies in our mind, each trying to pull and push us in a different direction. We are trying to gently align all of these so that we are doing the meditation with our entire being.

We can also regard the first stage of the meditation as a stage of *"letting go"*. Different distractions will keep coming into our mind. Instead of getting carried away by any one of these, we just try to let go of the distraction as soon as we are aware that it has arisen.

The second stage we can regard as a *stage of consolidation, alignment*. When different tendencies manifest and try to pull us in different directions we do not try to suppress them. Instead we try to invite them to join in the meditation, bring the energy trapped in these tendencies along to the meditation.

The third and fourth stages can be regarded as increasingly settling down to deeper and deeper levels of integration and awareness. We finally reach a stage where we are fully aware of the breath and our entire mind is soaked with this awareness. For example, when flour is thoroughly kneaded with water we get dough, which is soft, smooth, elastic. Similarly when the breath soaks the mind and vice versa we get to a state of joy, bliss, a feeling of being highly concentrated, integrated.

Although the steps outlined above are progressive, it is important not to get obsessed with the goal of achieving some mind state. *The effort is always towards setting up the conditions for meditation to arise, and not to try and achieve some particular "ideal" mind state. At all times one has to be aware of the current state of one's mind, and be willing to patiently and skilfully work with whatever the current state of our mind is.* If it is over anxious and straining we need to find a way to relax and let go. If it is bored and wandering, we need to find a way to get it interested in the object of meditation. Some amount of creativity, experimentation, trial and error will all be needed to do this.

## About Jinarakshita



Dharmachari Jinarakshita is a member of the Triratna Sangha, a Buddhist Sangha which aims at trying to engage with the Buddha's teachings in the conditions of the modern world. Members of the Triratna Sangha teach meditation, study the Buddha's teaching together, engage with the Arts, support each other through life, as well as engage with their local communities. The Triratna Sangha also promotes projects in which Buddhists can live and work together, and explore how to turn their work into a spiritual practice.

## About Open WellBeing

Open WellBeing is a community driven movement to improve everyone's wellbeing. Our key objective is to enable each individual to explore their own holistic wellbeing by their own efforts. We are adopting **holistic and individualised** approach to wellbeing. Our primary goal is to explore and identify wisdom required for individual's wellbeing and making it available to everyone at an affordable cost. We are a not for profit company.

To join this movement please log on to - [www.openwellbeing.org](http://www.openwellbeing.org)

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