



Breath To Nibbana

A distressed and pained mind is easily distracted and scattered. Then, body and mind become restless. One becomes irritable. One may speak harsh words. One may be sullen. One may sigh. This restlessness can make one ill.

It may be that neither such a person nor a physician would discover the cause or source of the illness. Even at times of apparent well being symptoms of the illness still persist!

When one has nobody in whom to confide one's stresses then one has to bear the pain. There are many good people whose heart will melt at others' troubles. One may find the needed compassion in a person who follows the Buddha's path. Such a kind

person may render help with no expectation of a returned favour. He or she may help another person whatever his or her station in life, creed or belief.

Compassion for people in trouble is a natural way of life for the Buddha's disciples.

Compassion is also a necessary element of a meditation associated with, and given the name of, loving-kindness.

However, there is a meditation that promotes mental well-being and is an antidote for mental stress. It is the mindfulness of in-out breathing.

We breathe in and out from the time we are born. We continue doing so until death. This happens due to a natural reflex action to keep us alive. Being mindful of that action is what we call the 'mindfulness of in-out breathing'.

This is one of the fundamental kinds of meditation that the Buddha practiced and taught. This is different from the breathing exercises athletes perform to help their chest muscles and lungs expand. '**Mindfulness of in-out breathing**' is a meditative process to calm the mind and achieve concentration. It is not any kind of prayer or ritual. It is a wise way for the introspection of life.

The meditator finds a restful, quiet environment free from distracting conditions. He or she should sit with back straight. Experienced practitioners of this meditation sit on a level floor, the legs folded inwards and under, hands resting on the lap, palms facing upwards, right hand upon the left. However, beginners may feel more comfortable and relaxed sitting on a straight-backed chair. Those who begin practicing this meditation sitting on a chair may benefit by gradually practicing it sitting on a level floor

The meditator breathes in and out two or three times and tries to relax. First, close the eyes and thinks: “Homage to the Exalted One, the Fortunate One, and the Fully Enlightened One. He taught me this meditation.” Let the meditator repeat this thought of homage three times, as is the customary and traditional practice.

Now, remaining alert and mindful, one breathes in. Remaining alert and mindful, one breathes out. One closes one’s eyes and concentrates one’s mind at the tip of one’s nose or the region above the upper lip. However, one’s mindfulness is not about the area where the breathing touches, but about the act of breathing in and breathing out.

One guards the mind against scattering and grabbing other thoughts. One needs effort and concentration to sustain mindfulness of breathing. That effort is not physical. It is effort sustained by practice, attention and wisdom.

When one breathes in one is aware that one is breathing in. When one breathes out one is aware that one is breathing out. When one breathes in a short breath one is aware that one is breathing in a short breath. When one breathes out a short breath one is aware that one breathes out a short breath. When one breathes in a long breath one is aware that one is breathing in a long breath. When one breathes out a long breath one is aware that one breathes out a long breath. Thus one is mindful of the process of in-out breathing.

One's mind is not free from agitation at the beginning of one's meditation. As one continues to meditate one's mind becomes calm. One may hear a sound but one does not dwell upon the source of the sound. One may consider the sound as an impermanent thing and reject it from one's mind. One reverts to being mindful of one's breathing. Perhaps one may feel a pain in the knee due to being seated. One may briefly change one's posture to alleviate the pain and then revert to being mindful of breathing.

When one's mind is concentrated one may experience knowledge and vision according to reality. One does not pay attention to things one sees or does not see. One does not dwell on one's subconscious visions. One considers all mental formations as impermanent phenomena. One will thus remain mindful of breathing in and breathing out.

As one continues practicing mindfulness of in-and-out breathing one will succeed in rejecting all extraneous thoughts from entering one's mind. That is concentration. It is the mental state of firmly fixing the mind on a single object. In that state one gains the power of determination, courage and tranquillity to face the impact of worldly nature on one's life.

One's mind attains a state of joy and happiness. One's body and mind will be relaxed and free of the stresses that vexed one. The Supreme Buddha perfected the practice of mindfulness of in-out breathing during His search for Nibbana.

May you, the reader, understand and realize the Four Noble Truths through the practice of in-out breathing. This is the Buddha's way. May the peace and tranquillity it brings about lead you to the threshold of Nibbana.



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