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# Instructions on Ānāpānasati Meditation for Beginners

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The background of the cover features a serene sunset scene. Two traditional Buddhist stupas with tiered, conical roofs are silhouetted against a bright orange and yellow sky. In the distance, rolling hills or mountains are visible under the soft glow of the setting sun. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Bhikkhu Revata



## Biography of Bhikkhu Revata

Bhikkhu Revata was born in 1971 in Mawlamyine, Myanmar. He received his bachelor's degree from Yangon University in 1994 and independently taught computer technology for five years. He was ordained as a Theravāda bhikkhu at Pa-Auk Tawya in 1999, with the Most Venerable U Āciṇṇa, the Pa-Auk Sayadaw, as his preceptor. He has studied the Pāli scriptures and commentaries and speaks Burmese, English, and Thai.

After practising meditation under the guidance of the Most Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw, Sayadaw U Cittara, and Sayadaw U Sīla, in 2002 he began teaching meditation to local and foreign yogis, both ordained and lay, and is

currently an assistant teacher of the Pa-Auk Sayadaw. He is responsible for teaching local and foreign yogis and for training successful practitioners to teach meditation themselves.

A distinguished meditator and teacher, he has taught extensively both in Myanmar and abroad. He has conducted meditation retreats in China, Indonesia, Latvia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, United States of America, and Vietnam.

He has written four books in his native language, three of them in collaboration with the Most Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw. Bhikkhu Revata's English-language titles include *Awaken, O World!* (2006), *The Disciple Within* (2008), *Bearers of the Burden* (2011), *Expectation Derived from One's Own Point of View* (2015), *A Journey of Self-Discovery* (2015), and *The Truth Taught by All the Buddhas* (2016). His talks have been translated into Korean, Indonesian, Thai, Vietnamese, and Chinese.

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## Why Do We Meditate?

Why do we meditate? When asked, practitioners will offer many different reasons for practising meditation. Some do so for somewhat mundane reasons such as to relax, to be more efficient at work, to have a healthier mind and body, to calm the mind and be peaceful, to be happier, to cope better with life's ups and downs, and so forth. Others may meditate for the higher ideals of being free from suffering, or being able to put down the burden of the five aggregates. You may have your own reasons for wanting to practise meditation too.

Actually, practising meditation is the most important thing we can do in our lives. We may reap various mundane benefits as we undertake meditation practice to achieve the higher ideals. However, the ultimate aim of practising meditation should be to know the Truth.

After the Buddha realised the Truth, He became the Fully Enlightened One. The Buddha arose in the world with the arising of the realisation of the Truth.

Those who realise the Dhamma, the Truths, as they really are, are those who can make an end of suffering.

Those who have realised the Four Noble Truths, the Dhamma as they really are, are those who can put down their burden – the burden of the five aggregates.

The happiest people in the world are those who realise Nibbāna, the Deathless. There is no other happiness that can surpass the experience of the realisation of Nibbāna. There is no real happiness in sensuality.

People in the world pursue sensuality because they expect to derive happiness from the experience of sensuality. The Buddha did not say that there is no happiness in sensuality. He affirmed that there is. It is why people all over the world pursue sensuality.

However, this is not real happiness. Whether we get what we want or fail to get it, there is no real happiness in pursuing sensuality. That pursuit has no end. After a while, we encounter difficulties with all these things. Therefore, if we want real happiness, we need to practise meditation.

The only kind of happiness to be directly found in sensuality is unwholesome happiness. In pursuing sensuality, people all over the world are pursuing unwholesome happiness.

If you want to put down the burden of your five aggregates<sup>①</sup>, you should stop pursuing unwholesome happiness, which is sensual happiness. Instead, you should train your mind. Those who succeed in training the mind will know and see the Truth, the Dhamma as they really are.

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① For more details about the burden of the five aggregates and how to put it down, see *Bearers of the Burden*, by Bhikkhu Revata (Pa-Auk Meditation Centre, Singapore, Third Edition, 2015). The e-book version is available for download at [www.pamc.org.sg](http://www.pamc.org.sg).

People in the world are not familiar with the truth. They are familiar with untruth. The cause of suffering is not knowing the truth. Most people in the world have a lot of confusion in their minds because they do not know the truth. When they come to know the truth by practising meditation, their understanding and their vision will become clear so that they can remove their doubt. In this way they can become free from suffering step by step, eventually attaining Enlightenment.

The purpose of practising meditation, then, is to know and to see the Truth. It can also be put another way: The purpose of practising meditation is to train the mind – not to control the mind, but to train it. Controlling the mind and training it are two different things. If you meditate just with the intention to control your mind, you will not be successful. If you succeed in training your mind, you are controlling it indirectly.

Meditation practice is the training of the mind. Most people's minds are untrained. The trained mind

is completely different from the untrained mind. An untrained mind leads to suffering; a trained mind leads to freedom from suffering. The more we can train our minds, the happier we will be. Now, there are many types of training. We have been trained by others since we were young. Sometimes we ourselves train others. Meditation practice is self-training; it is the most important type of training as well as the most difficult.

Despite the difficulty, it is essential, because we cannot expect to experience real happiness unless we train the mind. Without training the mind, we cannot create a better life for ourselves either now or in the future. The only way to do so is to train the mind. Among all the different types of training – physical training, occupational training, et cetera – none is as difficult as the training of the mind. We therefore need to devote an adequate amount of time to this mental training in order to be successful. One who succeeds in the training of the mind knows and sees the Truth, the Dhamma as they really are.

To know and to see the Dhamma as they really

are, the Buddha taught three trainings: the training of morality, the training of concentration, and the training of insight. The first training, the training of morality, is to observe the precepts. This is the foundation. Based on this, you need to continue with the second training, the training of concentration. Without the first, the second cannot be developed.

In teaching the second training, the Buddha taught forty types of samatha meditation objects. We likewise teach meditators almost all forty kinds of samatha meditation objects when the conditions are right to do so. The purpose of practising the second training is to know and to see the Truths as they really are. As the Buddha said, ‘Bhikkhus, develop concentration. One who is concentrated knows and sees the Truths as they really are.’<sup>②</sup> Again, knowing and seeing the Truth, the Dhamma as they really are, is the purpose of practising meditation. If one

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② SN.V.12.1.1 Samādhisuttaṃ(SN 56.1 The Discourse on Concentration, also known as the Samādhī Sutta).

who is concentrated knows and sees the Dhamma, the Truths, as they really are, then it follows that one who is not concentrated will not know or see the Dhamma, the Truths as they really are. Knowing and seeing the Dhamma is the way to make an end of suffering. Knowing and seeing the Dhamma is the way to put down the burden of the five khandha, the five aggregates (body, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness). Knowing and seeing the Dhamma is the way to experience real happiness, Nibbāna, the Deathless. If you want to make an end of suffering in this very life and put down the burden of the five khandha and be happy, you need to know and to see the Dhamma, the Truths, as they really are. If you want to know and see the Dhamma, you need to develop concentration. Without developing concentration, it is impossible to know and to see the Dhamma as they really are.

We need to develop concentration so that we can see what cannot normally be seen. There are many things that cannot be seen with the naked eye.

As an example, we are constantly surrounded by many tiny bacteria. We know that they are in the air and on our skin and on our clothes, even though we cannot see them with the naked eye. Still, we know that the bacteria are all around us because scientists invented the microscope and have used it to see the tiny bacteria which cannot be seen by the unaided human eye. Similarly, the Dhamma penetrated by the Buddha and taught by Him – the Dhamma we all want to penetrate – is beyond the reach of the naked eye. Just as we cannot see the tiny bacteria without the help of a powerful microscope, even so we cannot know or see the Dhamma as they really are without concentration, because they are beyond the reach of the naked eye. Moreover, although we can see small bacteria with a microscope, the Dhamma as they really are cannot be seen even with the most powerful instruments. Knowing and seeing the Dhamma, the Truths, as they really are, is beyond the reach of any external instruments. The Truth cannot be realised by depending on any external instruments; they are of no use in this case, and we

do not need them. What we need is inner power. That power is concentration. It is something we need to develop for ourselves.

Keep in mind that, without having developed concentration, there is no way to realise the Dhamma, since only one who is concentrated can know and see the Dhamma as they really are, as the Buddha said. No matter how hard you try, and even if you spend the rest of your life trying, you will never know or see the Dhamma, the Truths, as they really are, unless you develop concentration.

People say, ‘First things first.’ If you want to know and see the Dhamma, you must do what comes first – what is of utmost priority – namely, you must develop concentration. This is the first thing.

## **Instructions on Ānāpānasati Meditation for Beginners. Why Ānāpāna?**

When the Buddha taught samatha or serenity meditation, He taught forty kinds of samatha meditation objects. One of these is ānāpānasati, mindfulness of the in-and-out breath, which is what we teach all beginners. The reason for starting with ānāpānasati is that all the bodhisattas practised ānāpānasati meditation as the foundation for their Full Enlightenment. Moreover, all the Buddhas greatly praised ānāpānasati meditation. Another reason for beginning with mindfulness of the breath is that, of the forty kinds of samatha meditation objects, the breath (ānāpāna in Pāḷi) is always with us from the time of our birth. Most other meditation objects are not things we have with us; we need to acquire or fashion them. Thus we choose to start with the object that is with us all the time.

## Breathe Naturally but Heedfully

We have been breathing since we were born up to the present moment. We are breathing naturally. We are breathing naturally but inattentively. This is breathing simply in order to live. We might also say that this is breathing simply in order to die.

When you take up the practice of ānāpānasati, you need to change just one thing, not a lot of things. Up to this point you have been breathing naturally but inattentively, the whole of your life. From now on, you are going to breathe naturally and mindfully. Your breathing will then become meditation practice. This way of breathing leads to the Deathless. You can now begin to practise ānāpānasati systematically.

## Sitting Cushion

First of all, sit appropriately. Don't sit directly on the floor; sit on a cushion that's wide enough to accommodate your legs. Under your buttocks, place another cushion which is about as thick as the width of two or three fingers. It's better if the cushion is slightly sloped and neither too hard nor too soft.



The Buddha wants us to keep our body straight. According to our teaching experience, if you sit directly on the large, level cushion with nothing under the buttocks, you need to keep making a lot of effort to keep the body straight. If you sit with a cushion of the right thickness under your buttocks, the body becomes straight by itself. Using two cushions is very helpful.

## Sitting Posture

For those who are going to develop concentration, I recommend a simple sitting posture. I do not recommend the full lotus or half lotus postures. They are not very helpful in developing concentration.



The simple sitting posture I recommend is to sit with both legs resting on the larger cushion and folded one inside the other, with the calves side by side and not resting one on top of the other. The legs should not press on or against each other. It will be good if you can sit like this. This sitting posture may be unfamiliar, but you should try. Within a few days you will become familiar with it, and it will be good for your long-term practice.

With the legs comfortably positioned, you

should keep the head and body upright. Place both palms in the lap, one hand resting on the other. The left palm can be on top of the right palm, or the other way round; you can do whichever you prefer. You need to close your eyes. Then you need to relax the body and the mind.

## Radiate Mettā to Calm the Mind

As we practise meditation in our search for the Dhamma, we need to develop a calm and stable mind. I suggest to all beginners that they calm their minds by radiating loving kindness (mettā). This is a good way of preparing to start ānāpānasati meditation. You should radiate mettā to yourself first, and then to a person you respect. You should first turn your attention to yourself; then, wishing yourself to be well and happy, you should radiate mettā by wishing in your mind, ‘May I be well and happy. May I be well and happy.’ Do this mindfully and naturally for a few minutes. After that, you

should bring to mind a person you respect and then radiate mettā towards that person. Men should choose a respected man as the object of their mettā; women should choose a respected woman. You then radiate mettā mindfully and naturally for a few minutes while wishing in your mind, ‘May he be well and happy. May he be well and happy’ or ‘May she be well and happy. May she be well and happy.’ If you prefer to radiate mettā towards all beings, you can also turn your attention to all beings in general and then radiate mettā to them all, mindfully and naturally, while wishing in your mind, ‘May all beings be well and happy. May all beings be well and happy.’ If you do this mindfully and naturally, your mind will very soon become calm. When the mind is calm, the breathing becomes natural. If the mind is active, the breathing will not be natural. Thus it is necessary to make the mind calm. Most of us are unfamiliar with the calm mind, so we need to radiate mettā in order to calm our minds.

## **Do Not Fix a Point When You Focus on the Breath**

When you feel relaxed in both body and mind, and when the mind is calm, the breathing becomes natural. You should then become aware of the breath somewhere around the nostrils or between the nostrils and the upper lip. Some find that the breath is clearest somewhere around the nostrils; others find that it is clearest between the nostrils and the upper lip. However, beginners should not try to focus on the breath at a single fixed point. The breath is changeable. You should simply be aware of the breath wherever you feel it, so long as it is somewhere in front of the nostrils or between the nostrils and the upper lip. You should focus on the breath wherever you feel it in this area.

## Note ‘In’ and ‘Out’ with the Breath

When you breathe in and when you breathe out, the breath touches somewhere. You should focus on the breath in the area of the nostrils or above the upper lip, wherever you feel the breath as you breathe in and out. You should also note ‘in’ and ‘out’ as you breathe. Breathing and noting should be done quite naturally.

## Focus on the Breath, Not the Touch

The breath itself is different from the point where it is touching and where its touch is felt. Your emphasis must be on the breath, not on the touching point or the touch. Your object must be the breath itself. According to the Visuddhimagga, ‘phuṭṭhaphuṭṭhokāse pana satim ṭhapetvā bhāventasseva bhāvanā sampajjati’ – ‘There is a place where the breath is touching. You need to focus

on the breath where it is touching. Only those who practise in this way can be successful in practising ānāpānasati meditation.’

We feel the breath around the area in front of the nostrils or above the upper lip because the breath touches a point somewhere in that area. We cannot feel the breath without the touch. If we feel the breath at a certain point, it means the breath is touching there. There is no need to look for the touch if we are feeling the breath.

As you focus on the breath where it is touching, you may sometimes feel the touch a little bit. It does not matter. You may sometimes feel the sensation a little bit too. Feeling the touch or feeling the sensation from time to time is not a problem, so long as you do not intentionally focus on either the touch or the sensation. However, if you focus on the touch and look for it and emphasise it, your ānāpāna meditation will not be on the right track. Heading in the direction of trying to know the touch means you are going in the wrong direction. If you feel the

breath, it means it is touching. You should just focus on the breath. This is enough. You do not need to find the touch.

### What Is Beneficial Is Difficult to Do

Focusing on the touch is easier than focusing on the breath. Therefore, we as practitioners want to focus on the touch. Remember what the Buddha said: ‘That which is not beneficial for one is easy to do. That which is truly beneficial for one is difficult to do.’<sup>③</sup>

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③ Dhṛp. 163:

Sukarāṇi asādhūṇi, attano ahitāṇi ca.

yaṃ ve hitaṇca sādhuṇca, taṃ ve paramadukkaraṃ.

Easy to do are things that are bad and harmful to oneself.

But exceedingly difficult to do are things that are good and beneficial.

### Not Too Much Effort

One thing you need to be careful of is putting in too much effort. As you are focusing on the breath based on where it is touching, if you apply a little more effort, however unintentionally, you will know the touch more than the breath and will then encounter difficulties. Characteristics of the four elements such as hardness, cohesion, and so forth will become clear. You will feel tension and hardness around the area in front of the nostrils. The tension and hardness arise because of excessive effort and because you are aware of the touch more than the breath. Too much effort causes you to know the touch or the sensation. While practising ānāpānasati meditation, you may sometimes feel hardness or tension around the nostrils or on the forehead or even develop a headache just because of putting in too much effort.

## **No Desire. No Expectation. No Attachment.**

As we are greedy beings, we want to be successful at whatever we do. We have a strong craving to improve. This inclination can be effective when it comes to worldly things – making a living, for example, which requires a lot of craving and expectation. We do not need any of these things in our search for the Dhamma. In fact, we need to renounce craving, expectation, and attachment in seeking the Dhamma. Instead of these things, we need a calm mind. Craving and expectation cause us to put too much effort into our practice.

## **Meditation Is for Happiness**

Desire and expectation give rise to a lot of dukkha (suffering) in our practice. Dukkha is caused not by meditation but by our desire and expectations.

Meditation practice is for sukha (happiness), not for dukkha. If greed, desire, and expectation creep into our practice, our effort will become stronger. Instead of knowing the breath, we will know more of the touch. We will then encounter many difficulties in our practice. To prevent or remedy this, you should just emphasise focusing on the breath where it is touching. When you breathe in, note ‘in’; when you breathe out, note ‘out’.

## **Focus on the Natural Breath, and Do Not Control the Breath**

We have been breathing naturally and inattentively since birth. Now we are going to change only one thing – we change from inattentiveness to mindfulness. We are going to breathe naturally and mindfully.

When we practise meditation, we need to focus on the natural breath. We should not breathe forcefully to make the breath obvious. Even though we breathe naturally throughout our lives, with some exceptions such as when we are exercising

or singing, most of us breathe strongly to make the breath obvious during meditation. Breathing like this is not the way to develop concentration; it will give rise to many difficulties in our meditation practice. If we control our breathing during meditation, we cannot succeed in the practice. Instead, let the breathing be natural, just as it is, and just as it was before we sat down to meditate. All we need to do is to become aware of the breathing by changing from inattentiveness to mindfulness.

### **Focus on the Breath at One Point Only**

We need to develop one-pointed mind on one object; so if the in-breath and out-breath touch in different places, we should choose only one of them. We should feel the in-and-out breath at one place, not two places. If we try to focus on the breath at two different places, we cannot develop one-pointed mind.

### **Way of Focusing: From Perception to Mind**

We know we are breathing in and breathing out through our two nostrils, so this is our starting point. We start focusing on the breath in the area of the nostrils.

After a while, we may feel the breath somewhere in front of the original spot, or below it, above it, to the left of it, or to the right of it. We may then think we were mistaken about where to focus on the breath, and then we bring our mind back to the original place. Then our practice becomes worse. We learn by experience that this is not the right thing to do.

We start focusing by means of our perception. Perception here means that we know from knowledge and past experience that we are breathing through these two nostrils. So we mark that place. Marking occurs because of our perception aggregate. We start to focus on the breath at the place that our perception aggregate has marked. The perception aggregate is

initially the predominant mental factor that directs our mind to the place where we pay attention to the breath. As we continue to focus on the breath, the focusing becomes a function of the mind with all its associated mental factors working together. The place where we focus on the breath with the mind may be slightly different from the place originally marked by our perception. Actually, we are focusing with the mind, and the place where the mind focuses is more important than the place originally marked by our perception aggregate. Hence we should keep focusing on the breath wherever the mind focuses. We should not move our focusing back to the place marked by our perception. Otherwise, we will not improve in our meditation.

### **Focus Where We Feel the Breath**

We should clearly understand that there is no place other than these two nostrils where we are breathing in and breathing out. After we have been

focusing on the object for a while, we feel the breath somewhere. This spot may be above, below, to the left, or to the right of the initial spot. When this happens, if we are sure that we are focusing on the breath, we should just be with it.

When we have become skilful at focusing on the breath, we will know that there is no place other than these two nostrils where the breath is going in and going out. It may appear as if the breath is going in and out somewhere else, but it only appears to be so. It really goes in and out only in the area in front of the nostrils. We do not need to bring our mind back using our perception.

It feels strange if we seem to be breathing somewhere else besides the nostrils. We resist feeling strange – it is uncomfortable – so we bring our mind back to the original place. As a consequence, we encounter difficulties.

Many meditators are unable to develop concentration simply because they have not had the

opportunity to hear this explanation. They bring their minds back to the original place again and again, and so they are repeatedly doing the wrong thing. By doing so, they fail to make any progress. In the end, they become depressed.

### **Wandering Thoughts**

If one's concentration and mindfulness are weak while practising ānāpānasati meditation, wandering thoughts will arise. When wandering thoughts arise, do not pay attention to them; above all, do not follow them. Ignore them as quickly as possible, and gently bring the mind back to the breath. Whenever wandering thoughts arise, gently bring the mind back to the breath, without getting interested in those thoughts.

### **Pain and Numbness**

After sitting for a while – say, twenty or thirty minutes –you may feel pain or numbness in your knees or your legs. Unless you can focus on the breath continuously for longer and longer periods of time during ānāpānasati meditation, it is normal for pain to arise eventually. At first it is just a little bit of discomfort. You do not need to worry. You should just keep focusing on the breath as usual while ignoring the pain.

### **Practising the Pāramī of Patience**

Everyone is capable of practising patience to some degree. As we are practising meditation for the purpose of making an end of suffering, we all need to fulfil ten pāramī (perfections). One of these is khanti, patience. The only time we get the opportunity to practise patience is when we encounter difficulties.

If no one complains about us, we will have no opportunity to practise patience. If no one accuses us, we will have no opportunity to practise patience. If others do not find fault with us, we will have no opportunity to practise patience. If we have no pain, we have no opportunity to practise patience. Pain is our opportunity to practise the perfection of patience.

The wise have this point of view. When others complain against them or accuse them of something or find fault with them, they regard their accusers and critics as their benefactors. Without such critics, it is impossible to practise patience. The foolish have the opposite point of view. When they are criticised, they react and want to take revenge.

We may need to change our point of view, and adopt a different attitude towards those who complain about us and accuse us and find fault with us. There are two types of people to whom we should be grateful in life – those who praise us and those who blame us. Of course, we prefer praise to blame, but we need blame for the sake of our maturity. To

practise patience, we must deal with people who criticise us. It is not easy, but it is possible. We need to train and practise. When we are criticised or blamed, our first reaction may be a feeling of unhappiness or displeasure, but we should counter this by calling to mind that our critics are giving us the opportunity to practise patience.

Therefore, when you feel pain in your knees or legs, you need to be patient. You should practise patience – up to a point. If the pain is not very strong, you can practise patience. However, when it becomes strong, you should change your sitting posture.

### **Ignoring the Pain Initially**

If initially the pain is not very strong, you can ignore it. If you can maintain a steady and continuous focus on the breath, the pain or numbness will gradually lessen. If you can maintain this focus for a longer time, the pain or numbness will disappear by itself altogether.

## **Change Posture If the Pain Disturbs One's Natural Focus**

If you cannot maintain a steady and continuous focus on the breath for a long time, the pain or numbness will become stronger. If you want to focus on the breath in the face of strong pain, you need to breathe forcefully. If you do so, you will not be on the right track, because breathing this way will disturb your natural focusing. If strong pain or numbness disturbs your natural focusing, then you should change your sitting posture. You will feel better if you move your legs by switching the front or outside leg with the back or inside leg. You should change posture slowly, while mindfully focusing on the object. You can also change to any other posture you prefer.

## **Awareness in All Four Postures**

Regardless of whether we are sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, we should keep focusing on the breath as much as possible in all of the four postures. We should be as mindful of the object as we can be. If the mind is trained to be with the breath almost continuously in all four postures, mindfulness will improve. When mindfulness improves, we will be able to develop concentration.

## **Developing One-Pointed Mind**

Developing concentration means developing one-pointed mind focused on one object. A one-pointed mind focused on one object is a concentrated mind. To say that we are concentrated means that we can develop one-pointed mind focused on one object continuously for longer and longer periods of time. Thus, as much as we can, we need to train the mind to be with one object as continuously as possible.

## Appearance of Light

As you improve gradually in your ability to maintain continuous awareness of the breath, you will be able to increase the length of time you can focus on the object – initially for thirty minutes, then an hour, and gradually up to two hours. At some point, concentration causes light to appear. Since individual paramī differs from meditator to meditator, the manner and timing of the appearance of light differs accordingly. Some meditators see light after focusing continuously for just half an hour. Others need to focus for an entire hour before they see light. Still others need even more time until they see light. The initial location of the light also varies. Relative to the place where the breath is being observed, the light may appear in front and a little distance away. Sometimes it is above or below, or to the left or the right. Only a very few meditators experience the first appearance of the light at the focus point itself, together with the breath, which is the best place for it to appear. Nevertheless,

there is no need to compare our own experience with anyone else's. We should simply practise, emphasising our focus on the breath. The appearance of light is the result of focusing well on the breath.

## If the Light Is Unstable, Continue Focusing on the Breath

When the light starts to appear, almost all beginners find that it is unstable. It appears and disappears; it comes and goes. It will attract your mind, and you will be very interested in it. However, you should resist this interest and instead just be with the breath as usual. If you keep focusing on the breath longer and longer – the light that appears and disappears, and comes and goes – it will appear longer and longer. If you continue simply focusing on the breath continuously, longer and longer, sitting by sitting, the light will eventually appear for the whole sitting. It may not yet be near the nostrils but a little bit away from them. Again, you should just continue

focusing on the breath, with the aim of focusing for longer periods of time and improving the quality of your focus. If you do this sitting after sitting, the light that appears somewhere in front or above or below the focus point will draw closer to your nostrils. If as this happens you just keep focusing on the breath as before, the light will finally unify with the breath.

### **Unification of Light with Breath**

At first, the unification is unstable. You need to maintain your focus on the breath until the unification lasts for thirty minutes. When that happens, you should switch your awareness from the breath to the light (the nimitta). If your nimitta is really stable when you shift awareness from the breath to the light, your concentration will become stronger, and the light will also become brighter. However, even if the nimitta is stable, it may weaken because your awareness is not yet continuous. If that happens, you should bring the mind back to the breath again.

### **Focusing on the Nimitta**

If you can focus well on the nimitta, on the light, at the same place you focus on the breath, continuously and for longer and longer periods of time, while ignoring the breath, your concentration will grow stronger. Consequently, the light will become brighter. It will expand and become bigger and will spread throughout the body. You are on the right track. Still, you should pay attention to the light at the same place you focus on the breath and not anywhere else.

### **Focus on the Nimitta, Not the Energy**

As concentration improves, the concentrated mind produces light. As the unification stabilises, you feel energy around the area where you are focusing. It is good energy, not bad. Because of that energy, you can easily fix your mind there. However, the energy is not your object; your object is the nimitta.

You will feel the energy but should pay no attention to it. Because of that energy and the improvement in your concentration, you can fix your mind at the focus point, where the energy is, whenever you want to do so. You can fix your mind there all the time. Whether sitting, standing, walking, or lying down, you have a place to fix your mind any time you choose to do so.

### **Allow Effort to Grow Steadily**

You find it easy to maintain your focus at the focus point due to that energy. The desire to improve can sometimes prompt excessive effort. If you then put in a lot of effort, your concentration will become stronger and the light will become brighter, but you will not be able to maintain your concentration for a long time. This is not the right way to practise. Instead, you should let your concentration deepen on its own just by focusing on the nimitta in a steady way. In every circumstance, excessive effort, rooted as it is in desire and greed, is a big disturbance.

### **Entering Absorption Concentration**

If you can keep focusing on the nimitta in a steady way, properly, naturally, mindfully, and for longer and longer periods of time, you will attain absorption concentration.

### **Develop Concentration to Know and See the Dhamma**

The Buddha says, ‘One who is concentrated knows and sees the Dhamma as they really are.’ We practise meditation in order to know and to see the Dhamma as they really are. Therefore, we should practise meditation in order to develop concentration.

## Dedication and Sharing of Merits

This book is a gift of Dhamma. We have acquired merit by publishing this booklet, designing its cover, editing it, proofreading it, sponsoring its printing and distribution, and simply rejoicing in its publication. Let us dedicate all the merits we have thus accumulated to our parents, teachers, kalyāṇamitta (good Dhamma companions), relatives, friends, and all beings.

May all of them associate with the wise, hear and learn the True Dhamma, possess Right View, and very soon experience the cool bliss of the True Dhamma. May the merits from this gift of Dhamma be a supporting condition for their realisation of Nibbāna. May they be free from all danger and afflictions. By the power of the Triple Gem, may all of them be well and happy.

By the power of whatever wholesome states that have been achieved, may all beings realise the

Teaching of the Buddha, which leads to happiness.

By means of the practice, which is pure and happy, may they attain the state which is free from sorrow and despair; and may they attain the supreme bliss of Nibbāna.

Long may the True Dhamma endure. May all beings respect the Dhamma. May the rain god give proper and timely rain.

May this merit of mine bring about the destruction of the taints. May this merit be a supporting condition for the realisation of Nibbāna. I share my merit with all beings; may they all receive an equal share of my merit.

May the departed gain rebirth in the wholesome realms of humans and devas, and may they smoothly and swiftly realise Nibbāna.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

## Instructions on Ānāpānasati Meditation for Beginners

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Buddhasāsanam ciraṃ tiṭṭhatu!

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