

Instructions for sitting meditation, walking meditation and establishing mindfulness in daily activities

(From the appendix to "In This Life Itself" by Bhante Dhammajīva)

Sitting meditation

When undertaking *ānāpānasati bhāvanā*, a yogi practises both insight meditation and concentration meditation (*vipassanā* and *samatha bhāvanā*).

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, *Ānāpānasati sutta* and the *Girimānanda sutta*, the Buddha discussed the suitable environment and the appropriate posture for the *ānāpānasati* practice.

Ānāpānasati bhāvanā must be practised in a relaxed environment, with a little breeze and a medium amount of light. The yogi must be in solitude and consider a comfortable and conducive posture. It is recommended that the yogi sit firmly on the ground in the full lotus posture.

Alternatively, the yogis can sit in a half-lotus or quarter-lotus posture. Yogis with disabilities or weak health conditions that preclude them from sitting on the ground can use a meditation bench or a straight-backed chair. It is important that the yogi sits in a symmetrical and relaxed manner, keeping the upper part of the body erect. An erect posture facilitates the movement of air through the body and energizes the meditation practice.

Close your eyes and sit in a comfortable, relaxed, symmetrical and erect manner and become mindful of the sitting posture. Do a mental scan of the posture, bringing your mind to the present. Do not think about the past or the future, the person sitting in front of you or those around you. Sitting in solitude with the least amount of distractions is recommended.

If you customarily sit in a particular place, you will become accustomed to it and it will be conducive for your practice. Early sittings of course will be a trial and error process. Through experience, you will identify the most conducive posture for you. Once you know your alignment and the posture that works best, you can commence *ānāpānasati bhāvanā*. Bring your attention to the present, to the "here and now". Sitting in this manner in itself is a meditative experience. Remain in the present to avoid chain thoughts, irritating sounds or bodily pains that may disturb you.

Focus your attention on the primary object. Then your attention will converge to one part of the body - your nostrils, the top of the lip, the throat or the diaphragm. Do not do forced breathing to locate the in-breath and the out-breath, or to gain a prominent experience. Let the breath become prominent at its own pace.

Gradually, the in-breath and the out-breath will become prominent. The breathing must be natural and not forced. Becoming aware of the in-breath and the out-breath continuously, the breathing process will become prominent at a particular point. Your attention should be refined to this point.

According to the *Satipaṭṭhāna sutta*, you should focus on the object in front of you (*parimukhaṃ satim uppatthapetvā*). Classically, the attention of the in-breath and the out-breath is referred to as being at the tip of the nose or at the top of the lip (as an object in front of you). But some may find the most prominent

point of touch to be in the middle of the skull, the throat, the chest or in the navel. Wherever it may be, your attention should be confined to one place and you should not allow the mind to move from one place to another. As you progress with meditation, your focus will become refined and calmness will set in.

Observe the in-breath as a separate unit from the out-breath. Observe the in-breath and its touch. Be fully aware of the out-breath as it occurs. Gradually the noting mind will move closer to the breath and you will experience the in-breath and the out-breath in a contrasting and different manner. The air draught of the in-breath may appear cooler than the out breath or the out-breath may appear warmer. Or else, you will observe that the in-breath as longer than the out-breath or vice versa. Do not manipulate what is occurring. Just observe the transaction of air.

Owing to continuous mindfulness, irritating sounds, bodily pains, day dreaming or fantasizing will not distract you. If distractions come and go without any interference, you can continue to observe the in-breath and the out-breath. By making a mental note of the in-breath as "in" and the out-breath as "out", you can keep casual thinking, bodily sensations or sounds at bay.

With continuous mindfulness, the breathing will become subtle. With a refined observation and a calming down of the body, the breath will become less prominent. Mindfully, you must observe the difference between continuing in-breaths and continuing out-breaths.

Earlier you observed the difference between the in-breath and the out-breath. Now you must observe the in-breaths and the out-breaths in their totality, from the beginning, through the middle to the end. Observe the difference between one in-breath to the next and one out-breath to the next.

Distractions such as thoughts, sounds or bodily pains will occur. Do not react to them. If you are a habitual thinker or day-dream, make a mental note that you are "thinking", bringing your attention back to the breath. Or else, you should note it as "thinking-thinking-thinking", "day-dreaming - day-dreaming - day-dreaming" or "fantasizing-fantasizing-fantasizing".

Noting thinking as "thinking", you don't digest the contents of the thought. Simply become aware that "thinking" has occurred. Don't be concerned about the content of the thought. Similarly, if a sound irritates you, just note it as "hearing-hearing-hearing". When pain arises, note it as "pain-pain-pain". When they recede, come back to the breath and note the in-breath as "in" and the out-breath as "out". The noting mind and the object of meditation must be aligned, straightened. That is the purpose of meditation.

Your observations during meditation must be discussed with an advanced yogi every two to three days. By doing this, you can receive guidance on how to advance in your practice. The distractions encountered in the practice will be specific to your personality traits.

By reporting to an advanced yogi, you will receive the appropriate instructions. With practice, you can determine whether your natural inclination is towards concentration or insight meditation. It is very difficult to predict this beforehand. Both the meditation and the reporting will lead to the proper path. Your observations must be clear and your reporting should be to the point.

Generally, a beginner yogi must do at least an hour of sitting meditation daily.

Walking Meditation

After a meal or a sleep, it is recommended that you do walking meditation before sitting meditation.

A period of walking meditation before sitting serves to focus the mind.

In traditional meditation centres there are open-air and internal walking meditation paths. Internal meditation paths are covered to avoid adverse weather conditions.

Before commencing walking meditation, stand at the end of the walking meditation path and contemplate the body. Bring your attention to the present moment. During walking meditation, you establish mindfulness amidst activity as your eyes are open and you will hear the sounds of birds and the external environment. The mindfulness established can be carried forward to day to day activities.

The yogi must first walk up and down the path to activate blood circulation (especially after a long session of sitting meditation). Walk at a normal pace to ensure that the path is suitable and that there are no obstructions. Become aware of the movement of the feet. Your arms must be as if tied in front of you or behind you. Your attention must be on the movement of the feet. When the right foot moves, observe the experience of the movement and the sensations of the foot. Experience and note the sensation of the sole touching the ground. Observe whether the sensation is coarse or soft. Then shift your focus to the left foot, its movement and the sensation as it touches the ground. Your attention could also be kept on the movement of the joints, the ankle and so forth.

Your eyes should be cast down and you must look about five feet ahead of you. The eyes should be focused on the walking path. Just as during sitting meditation, your attention may be carried away by thoughts and sounds, but your attention should remain with the right foot and the left foot as much as possible. Continuous attention on the right foot and the left foot allows you to keep distractions at bay and to proceed without any interference.

During walking meditation, you exert energy to maintain the focus on the steps and to note the movement of the feet. Accordingly, the energy that is exerted must be double. Warming up in this manner is conducive for sitting meditation. During intensive retreats it is usual to alternate periods of sitting meditation with periods of walking meditation, one after another throughout the day.

In your daily life, you must have at least one session of walking and sitting meditation in the morning and in the evening. If you meditate in the evening after work, doing some walking before sitting focuses the mind and arouses energy for the sitting that follows. Do not commence sitting meditation straight after your daily activities. The energy aroused during walking meditation, develops accuracy of awareness as well as durability of concentration.

Establishing Mindfulness in Daily Activities

Doing a task simply for the purpose of establishing mindfulness is difficult in our daily activities. Generally we do things for a purpose or to fulfil responsibilities. But to control the speed of our daily activities, we must find some time to establish mindfulness.

Try to bring your attention to the present moment as much as you can so that you are accountable for our experiences and actions. You will no longer attend to daily activities mechanically, like a puppet or a robot. With mindfulness, the experience is live and vivid.

Unless you are experienced in maintaining continuous mindfulness, it is rather difficult to be mindful when you are socializing or attend to numerous tasks. To establish mindfulness in daily activities, become mindful of personal activities such as washing, showering or going to the toilet. You can start doing things *Silently*, *Mindfully* and *Slowly*. This is the "SMS" that you should apply when establishing mindfulness in daily affairs. In this way, the mindfulness established during sitting meditation could be extended to day to day activities.

Establishing mindfulness during sitting meditation is an intensive method of meditation. Walking meditation is a semi-intensive method and establishing mindfulness in day to day affairs is an extensive method. Mastering the art of establishing mindfulness in day to day activities, you become more organized and will experience an appealing change in your life.

Mindfulness cultivated during sitting meditation can diminish after you get up. But, the mindfulness established in day to day activities is durable. Both sitting meditation and wakefulness to day to day activities must complement each other to ensure continuous application of mindfulness.

Although instructions for sitting meditation (being the intensive method) are given first, you should not underestimate the benefits of walking meditation or establishing mindfulness in day to day activities. One can observe very profound aspects of the *dhamma* during walking meditation, and even become enlightened.