

## Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation – Four Tetrads (16 Aspects)

**1<sup>st</sup> Tetrad – Mindfulness of the Body** (focusing on the breath itself, as part of one's experience of the body)

- Breathe in *long*; breathe out long – discern the in-breathing and out-breathing.
- Breathe in *short*; breathe out short – be sensitive to other variations in the breath (e.g. deep/shallow, heavy/light) and so be more actively involved in the breathing process.
- Breathe in *sensitive to the whole body*; breathe out sensitive to the whole body – do a body scan; notice the breathing with respect to the entire body (no longer narrowly focused on the sensation of the breathing). Breathing is a whole-body process – an energy flow goes throughout the entire body.
- Breathe in *calming the body*; breathe out calming the body – calm the breathing for it to be gentle and soothing.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Tetrad – Mindfulness of Feelings** (focusing on the feelings created by the way one pays attention to the breath)

- Breathe in sensitive to *rapture*; breathe out sensitive to rapture – ask what kind of breathing would be refreshing?
- Breathe in sensitive to *pleasure*; breathe out sensitive to pleasure – breathe in a way that feels easeful and pleasant.
- Breathe in sensitive to *mental fabrication*; breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication – (1) remember that the mind helps fabricate feelings (they don't come and go on their own); *perceptions* have an effect on the mind; (2) see how feelings induced by the breath have an effect on the mind.
- Breathe in *calming mental fabrication*; breathe out calming mental fabrication – find the perception that is most calming to the mind.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Tetrad – Mindfulness of the Mind** (focusing on the state of the mind as it tries to stay with the breath)

- Breathe in *sensitive to the mind*; breathe out sensitive to the mind – notice if the mind is in balance or out of balance.
- Breathe in *satisfying the mind*; breathe out satisfying the mind – if the mind is depressed, sluggish, or stale: (1) see how you can breathe in and out to gladden the mind; or, (2) use other types of meditation to gladden the mind (e.g. Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, generosity); then (3) go back to the breath and maintain the sense of gladness.
- Breathe in *steadying the mind*; breathe out steadying the mind – if the mind is restless or scattered: (1) see what kind of breathing could steady it; or, (2) see what other meditation topics could steady it (e.g. reflection on death or the five reflections of aging, illness, death, separation, karma); then when the mind is focused, (3) bring the focus back to the breath.
- Breathe in *releasing the mind*; breathe out releasing the mind – if the mind feels burdened, figure out how to release it from its burdens, especially from unskillful thinking; (1) focus on the object of the thinking (e.g. desire for something and seeing its not-so-desirable aspect; anger with its focus on the all negative aspects); (2) focus on the thinking itself.

**4<sup>th</sup> Tetrad – Mindfulness of Dhammas** (focusing on the mental qualities – the component factors that go into shaping the state of the mind – that are involved in developing dispassion for the whole process of fabrication)

- Breathe in dwelling on *impermanence* (inconstancy); breathe out dwelling on impermanence (inconstancy) – realize that things keep changing unreliably; therefore, keep this perception of inconstancy and also see what happiness is falsely pinned on it, thereby causing stress (this is the task of the first Noble Truth, to understand suffering); understand attachment (passion – its gratification and drawbacks).
- Breathe in dwelling on *dispassion* (fading of passion); breathe out dwelling on dispassion (fading of passion) – develop dispassion for stress and its causes (feelings and perceptions); abandon and let the stress go (this is the task of the second Noble Truth, to abandon the cause).
- Breathe in dwelling on *cessation*; breathe out dwelling on cessation – realize that when dispassion comes, fabrications begin to stop (passion keeps them going); focus on cessation.
- Breathe in dwelling on *relinquishment*; breathe out dwelling on relinquishment – stay focused on relinquishment as you breathe in and out; let go of everything.

### Great Rewards of This Practice

All seven factors for awakening are developed through this practice: (1) *mindfulness* – keep the breath in mind; (2) *analysis of qualities* – see how the sense of the body and mind are being fabricated through the breath and the perceptions around the breath; (3) *persistence/energy/effort* – do the best to fabricate in skillful ways and abandon unskillful fabrications; (4) *rapture* – realize that refreshment will come through skillful action; (5) *serenity* – realize that ease will come through skillful action; (6) *concentration* – develop concentration; (7) *equanimity* – watch with equanimity all these aspects as they are happening.

### Result

These seven factors lead to *knowledge* and *release* – the knowledge of awakening (understanding what the mind has been doing that is causing stress), and release (how the mind can let go of the cause). When one has completed *all* the duties with regard to the four noble truths (to understand suffering; to abandon its origin, to cultivate the path, and to realize cessation) the mind no longer creates any unnecessary burdens for itself. It tastes the deathless.

In this way you can begin to see things as they actually are – as they are actually happening and being fabricated, and seeing where habits of fabrication are causing unnecessary suffering and stress. You come to see that the stress is actually unnecessary. There are choices you are making as you fabricate your experience out of the raw materials that come from past actions and, through the path, you learn how to make these choices more and more skillful to the point where there is really nothing more to do. Everything is at perfect equilibrium.

So this is what breath meditation can do. It's not just a preliminary exercise. It's a path that can take you all the way. You can augment it with other practices. When the mind needs gladdening or steadying, when you find that you're stuck with unskillful mental qualities, you can use other techniques to pry the mind free from them. But the breath is where you always come back. It's your home because it's right here, *where the body and the mind meet*. It's the ideal place to watch both what's going on in the body and what's going on in the mind.

**Source:** Notes by Alexander Peck are based on the following transcript: Thanissaro Bhikkhu. "The Breath All the Way (16 Steps)" (October 2010, No. 3). [http://www.dhammadata.org/mp3\\_index.html](http://www.dhammadata.org/mp3_index.html) (Dhamma talks and writings of Thanissaro Bhikkhu – <http://www.dhammadata.org/>)