

The Sutra on Mindful Breathing (803)

Taisho Tripitaka Vol. 2, No. 99, Tsa A Han (No. 29) 803
Chinese translated from Sanskrit by Gunabhadra, A.D. 435-443 (劉宋 Liu Song period)

Translated from Chinese by Thich Nhat Hanh

This is what I have heard at a time when the Buddha was residing in the Jeta Grove in the town of Sravasti.

On that day, the World-Honored One told the Bhiksus:

“Dear friends, let us enjoy the practice of Mindful Breathing. If a Bhiksu knows how to skillfully practice Mindful Breathing, and does so consistently, he will find his body and mind peaceful; he will acquire positive investigations and reflections; his mind will be calm and pure; and he will have perceptions leading to Wisdom and bring his practice to completion.

“This is how a bhiksu should proceed:

“Whether the bhiksu lives in a village or in a town, **¹ in the morning he puts on his sanghati, holds his begging bowl, and goes into town for alms round. While doing so, he knows how to protect his body and his six senses, his mind skillfully focused on whatever is present. After the alms round, he returns to his dwelling, puts his sanghati and begging bowl away, washes his feet, goes into the forest, to an empty room, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty space in the open air, and sits down in an upright position. He holds his mindfulness in front of him, releases all worldly pursuits, and lets go of his anger, torpor, restlessness, regret and doubt, his mind determined to be in accord with wholesome dharma, leaving far behind the five hindrances that cause afflictions, weaken his wisdom and constitute an obstacle on the path of Nirvana.

1. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, fully aware of his in-breath.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, fully aware of his out-breath.
2. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in a long or a short in-breath,
fully aware of his long or short in-breath.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out a long or a short out-breath,
fully aware of his long or short out-breath.
3. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, fully aware of his whole body.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, fully aware of his whole body.
4. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, relaxing his whole body.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, relaxing his whole body.

¹ Section marked between ** in this sutra is referred to in sutra 810.

5. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, experiencing joy.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, experiencing joy.
6. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, experiencing happiness.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, experiencing happiness.
7. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, aware of his feelings.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, aware of his feelings.
8. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, calming his feelings.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, calming his feelings.
9. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, aware of his mind.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, aware of his mind.
10. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, gladdening his mind.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, gladdening his mind.
11. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, concentrating his mind.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, concentrating his mind.
12. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, liberating his mind.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, liberating his mind.
13. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, contemplating impermanence.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, contemplating impermanence.
14. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, contemplating letting go.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, contemplating letting go.
15. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, contemplating non-desire.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, contemplating non-desire.
16. “Skillfully, he practices breathing in, contemplating cessation.
Skillfully, he practices breathing out, contemplating cessation. **

“Bhiksus! That is how the practice of Mindful Breathing helps make our body and mind peaceful, helps us acquire positive investigations and reflections, makes our mind calm and pure, helps us have perceptions leading to Wisdom, and brings our practice to completion.”

After the Buddha had finished his teaching, the bhiksus, having listened to the Buddha, happily put the teachings into practice.