

Ānāpānasati II Session 6 Home Practice and resources.

1. We continued exploring using the breath as part of a compassion practice. In the previous session 5, we introduced the Tibetan practice of Tonglen, using the breath to develop kindness and compassion. Two sets of instructions were offered, one from Joan Halifax and the other from Pema Chödrön. . People in the last session seemed to prefer one of these methods over the other.
 - a. We also talked about how Ānāpānasati works well with Metta practice, since both emphasize the positive states of ease, and a Metta phrase can be used to help “gladden the mind” in Ānāpānasati step 10. However, the Tonglen practice should be done after establishing some ease, or should be done as a separate practice altogether, since Tonglen starts the actual meditation by getting in touch with challenging emotions.
 - b. In Tonglen, as an alternative to changing from ‘darkness’ to ‘light’ within one cycle of inhaling and exhaling, you can try taking several breaths, as many as you need, to soak in the feeling of difficult emotions such as despair, anxiety, or aversion, focusing mainly on the inhale. Then, while giving light and relief for an equal amount of time, focus mainly on the exhales. Step 4., below, does show one way they could be combined in a short Gatha.
2. In addition, the usual instructions for Metta can be, and often are, coordinated with the inhale and exhale. Play with this. The resources this session contain two copies of a Metta chant, one of which is divided into a suggested way to coordinate a silent chant with the in and out breath.
3. Continuing our work with Thich Nhat Hanh’s ‘Gatha’ forms. Work with the creation of your own Gathas to help you remain mindful or to remind you to invite compassion into the moment. You may choose to pick a particularly triggering situation. As examples: A time you made a mistake and you felt foolish, a time you saw that your impatience caused you to be careless, or a time that you received some criticism and felt ‘not enough’. What phrase would be valuable and helpful? What key words could you pull out to coordinate with the breathing?
4. In the third example above, receiving criticism, the Gatha phrase could be merged into the Tonglen practice we did earlier, breathing in to acknowledge the dark and heavy and transforming the dark to stability and light on the out-breath:

“Breathing in, I feel the hurt of feeling ‘not enough.’ Breathing out, I know I am solid as a mountain and confident in my inherent worth.”

Shortened to:

(Breathing in) “Feeling hurt”

(Breathing out) “Feeling solid”

Chanting and Breathing

Chanting aloud in English or Pali is a wonderful practice. However, when we chant aloud, we have to pay attention to vocal control and production; in other words, we have to be sure we have enough breath to chant a whole phrase, making the breathing secondary.

We have been working with Thich Nhat Hanh's Gathas, which are mindfulness phrases that are short enough to be easily used aloud or during silent practice, as a way to coordinate words and awareness of breathing.

However, we can coordinate almost any chanting with our breathing when chanting silently to ourselves by simply finding a suitable place to break a chanting phrase into an in-breath part and an out-breath part, without worrying about vocalization. This is a wonderful way to turn any chant into a kind of Gatha practice. In this example, using one of my favorite chants, "Reflections on Universal Well-being", I've suggested where to divide the chant into an "in" and "out" breath. Note that the English and Pali words on each pair of lines, for the in and out breath won't match exactly, i.e. "homi" means "may I be", rather than "happy". Also, take these divisions as a suggestion, and feel free to divide them differently. Try chanting only English or only Pali, as well.

In-breath	Out-breath
Ahaṃ sukhito	homi
May I be	happy
Niddukkho	homi
May I be free from stress	and suffering
Avero	homi
May I abide	in kindness, free from animosity
Abyāpajjho	homi
May I abide	in compassion, free from ill-will
Anīgho	homi
May I abide with an	untroubled heart, free from anxiety
Sukhī attānaṃ	pariharāmi
May I maintain my	ease and well-being
Sabbe sattā	sukhitā hontu
May all living beings	be happy
Sabbe sattā	averā hontu
May all living beings abide	in kindness, free from animosity
Sabbe sattā	abyāpajjhā hontu
May all living beings	abide in compassion, free from ill-will
Sabbe sattā	anīghā hontu
May all living beings	abide with an untroubled heart, free from anxiety
Sabbe sattā	sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu
May all living beings	maintain their ease and well-being

Reflection on Universal Well-being

Ahāṃ sukhito hōmi

May I be happy

Niddukkho hōmi

May I be free from stress and suffering

Avero hōmi

May I abide in kindness, free from animosity

Abyāpajjho hōmi

May I abide in compassion, free from ill-will

Anīgho hōmi

May I abide with an untroubled heart, free from anxiety

Sukhī attānaṃ pariharāmi

May I maintain my ease and well-being

Sabbe sattā sukhitā hontu

May all living beings be happy

Sabbe sattā averā hontu

May all living beings abide in kindness, free from animosity

Sabbe sattā abyāpajjhā hontu

May all living beings abide in compassion, free from ill-will

Sabbe sattā anīghā hontu

May all living beings abide with an untroubled heart, free from anxiety

Sabbe sattā sukhī attānaṃ pariharantu

May all living beings maintain their ease and well-being

Sabbe sattā sabbadukkhā pamuccantu

May all living beings be free from all forms of suffering

Sabbe sattā laddha-sāmpattito mā vigacchāntu

May all living beings not be separated from their own goodness

Sabbe sattā kammaṣṣakā kammadāyādā

All living beings are the owners of their actions, are heir to their actions,

Kammāyonī kammabandhū kammaṇṇisaṇṇā

Are born through their actions, related through their actions, supported by their actions

Yaṃ kammaṃ karissanti kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā

Whatever they do for good or for ill

Tassa dāyādā bhavissanti

To that they will fall heir