

## THE SIXTEEN BREATHING EXERCISES

These exercises are taken from the Anapanasati Sutra on mindful breathing. There are sixteen exercises in all. The first four are to take care of our body. The second set of four exercises takes care of our feelings.

### The First Set of Four Exercises

The first exercise is mindfulness of our breathing. “Breathing in, I know I’m breathing in. Breathing out, I know I’m breathing out.” Bringing our awareness to our breathing, we stop all the thinking and focus only on our in-breath and out-breath.

The second exercise is “Breathing in, I follow my in-breath all the way through. Breathing out, I follow my out-breath all the way through. This exercise focuses and concentrates the mind. We follow our in-breath and out-breath from beginning to end without interruption.

The third exercise is “Breathing in, I’m aware of my body. Breathing out, I’m aware of my body.” With this exercise we remember we have a body and we bring our awareness to our body, reuniting body and mind. As you breathe in and out, becoming aware of your body, you may notice tension and pain in your body. You have allowed tension and strain to accumulate in your body, and that may be the starting place for any number of illnesses. That’s why you’re motivated to release these tensions; and it’s further applied in the fourth exercise of mindful breathing: “Breathing in, I release the tension in my body. Breathing out, I release the tension in my body.” Or: “Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I calm my body.” We may need some insight that can help us release the tension and calm the body.

Breathing exercise / Set 1	Description
Breathing in, I am aware of my in-breath. Breathing out, I am aware of my out-breath.	This very simple exercise can help you to let go of your thinking, your worries, and your fear. It gives you a lot of freedom right away.
Breathing in, I follow my in-breath all the way through. Breathing out, I follow my out-breath all the way through.	Follow your in-breath and out-breath closely, being aware of each one all the way through as if following a line with your finger. Breathing like that, not only are you aware of your breath, you are fully concentrating on that breath.
Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.	This exercise brings body and mind together. We are truly established in the here and now, living our life deeply in this moment.
Breathing in, I calm my body. Breathing out, I calm my body.	This exercise is to release the tension in the body. Releasing is a source of happiness.

## The Second Set of Four Exercises

With the fifth exercise you go from the realm of the body to the realm of feeling and you generate joy. “Breathing in, I’m aware of the feeling of joy.” A mindfulness practitioner is able to generate joy and happiness. It’s not so hard. There’s a little difference between joy and happiness. Joy still has some of the element of excitement or anticipation in it. In happiness, there is ease and freedom.

The French have a song they like to sing, “Qu’est-ce qu’on attend pour être heureux?” (What are you waiting for in order to be happy?) You can be happy right here and right now. When you bring your mind home to your body, you’re established in the present moment, and you become aware of the many wonders of life that are there, in and around you. With so many conditions of happiness available, you can easily create a feeling of joy, a feeling of happiness. Each exercise makes the next one possible.

So the fifth and the sixth exercises represent the art of happiness— how to generate joy and happiness for the sake of your enjoyment and your healing. The next two exercises are to recognize and take care of the pain that is there.

The seventh is “Breathing in, I’m aware of the painful feeling in me.” When a painful feeling arises, the practitioner knows how to use mindfulness to handle it. You don’t allow the painful feeling to overwhelm you or push you to react in a way that creates suffering for yourself and for others.

“Breathing in, I’m aware of the painful feeling in me. Breathing out, I’m aware of the painful feeling in me.” This is an art. We have to learn it, because most of us don’t like to be with our pain. We’re afraid of being overwhelmed by the pain, so we always seek to run away from it. There’s loneliness, fear, anger, and despair in us. Mostly we try to cover it up by consuming. There are those of us who go and look for something to eat. Others turn on the television. In fact, many people do both at the same time. And even if the TV program isn’t interesting at all, we don’t have the courage to turn it off, because if we turn it off, we have to go back to ourselves and encounter the pain inside. The marketplace provides us with many items to help us in our effort to avoid the suffering inside.

According to this teaching and practice, we do the opposite: we go home to ourselves and take care of the pain. The way to go home without fear of being overwhelmed by the pain is by practicing mindful walking or mindful breathing to generate the energy of mindfulness. Fortified with that energy, we recognize the painful feeling inside and embrace it tenderly. We lullaby the crying baby. Just as the third exercise is “aware of the body” and the fourth is “calming the body,” the seventh exercise is to be aware of the painful feeling and the eighth is to embrace, calm, and soothe the pain. All of the first eight exercises are simple, and are easy enough for us to practice in daily life.

Breathing exercise / Set 2	Description
Breathing in, I feel joy. Breathing out, I feel joy.	We can make use of mindfulness to bring in a feeling of joy any place, any time.
Breathing in, I feel happy. Breathing out, I feel happy.	Mindfulness helps us to recognize the many conditions of happiness we already have.
Breathing in, I am aware of a painful feeling. Breathing out, I am aware of a painful feeling.	When a painful feeling or emotion manifests, we should be there to take care of it. With mindfulness, we recognize the pain, embrace it, and bring relief.
Breathing in, I calm my painful feeling. Breathing out, I calm my painful feeling.	This exercise calms the body and mind, and makes them peaceful. Body, mind, feelings, and breath are unified.

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### The Third Set of Four Exercises

The ninth exercise is: “Breathing in, I am aware of the activities of my mind. Breathing out, I’m aware of the activities of my mind.” We continue to breathe mindfully and we recognize mental formations when they arise. And we can call them by their true names, such as “anger” or “joy.”

The tenth is to “gladden the mind— to get in touch with the wholesome seeds that are there in the soil of our mind and water them, so that they can manifest as mental formations or zones of energy that make us happy. We do this for our own benefit and for the benefit of our loved ones.

The eleventh exercise is “concentrating our mind.” And the twelfth is “liberating the mind.” Concentration, samadhi in Sanskrit, is a powerful force that you can generate to make a breakthrough, to see clearly what is there and understand its true nature. The object can be a pebble, a leaf, a cloud, or it can be your anger or fear. Anything can be the object of your concentration. I think scientists also practice concentration. In order to realize a deeper understanding of something, they have to concentrate totally on it. But the practice of concentration, as we are using it here, has the very specific aim and purpose of transforming the afflictions in us— the fear, the anger, the illusion— so that we can be free.

Breathing exercise / Set 3	Description
Breathing in, I am aware of my mind. Breathing out, I am aware of my mind.	The river of mind flows day and night. Mental formations take turns manifesting. We are there and recognize them as they arise, stay for some time, and go away.
Breathing in, I make my mind happy. Breathing out, I make my mind happy.	We gladden the mind by inviting the good seeds to manifest. The landscape of the mind becomes pleasant.
Breathing in, I concentrate my mind. Breathing out, I concentrate my mind.	We maintain awareness on the object of our concentration. Only concentration can liberate us from notions and bring insight.
Breathing in, I liberate my mind. Breathing out, I liberate my mind.	With this exercise, we untie all the knots in the mind. Calmly, we observe the mind in all its subtlety, to free ourselves from such obstacles as sadness and anxiety about the past and the future, and confusion and misperception in the present.

## The Fourth Set of Four Exercises

The thirteenth exercise is the concentration on impermanence. With the insight of impermanence, we see the interdependent and selfless nature of all that exists— that nothing has a separate, independent self.

With the fourteenth exercise, we recognize the true nature of desire and see that everything is already in the process of coming into being and disintegrating. With this insight, we no longer hold on to any object of desire or see any phenomenon as a changeless separate entity.

With the fifteenth exercise, we look into the nature of our ideas and notions and release them. When we're no longer grasping at notions, we experience the freedom and joy that comes from the cessation of illusion.

The sixteenth exercise helps us further shed light on desire and attachment, fear and anxiety, hatred and anger, and let them go. Our tendency is to think that if we let go, we'll lose the things that make us happy. But the opposite is true. The more we let go, the happier we become. Letting go doesn't mean we let go of everything. We don't let go of reality. But we let go of our wrong ideas and wrong perceptions about reality.

Breathing exercise / Set 4	Description
Breathing in, I observe the impermanent nature of all dharmas. Breathing out, I observe the impermanent nature of all dharmas.	The river of mind flows day and night. Mental formations take turns manifesting. We are there and recognize them as they arise, stay for some time, and go away.
Breathing in, I observe the disappearance of desire. Breathing out, I observe the disappearance of desire.	We gladden the mind by inviting the good seeds to manifest. The landscape of the mind becomes pleasant.
Breathing in, I observe cessation. Breathing out, I observe cessation.	We maintain awareness on the object of our concentration. Only concentration can liberate us from notions and bring insight.
Breathing in, I liberate my mind. Breathing out, I liberate my mind.	With this exercise, we untie all the knots in the mind. Calmly, we observe the mind in all its subtlety, to free ourselves from such obstacles as sadness and anxiety about the past and the future, and confusion and misperception in the present.