

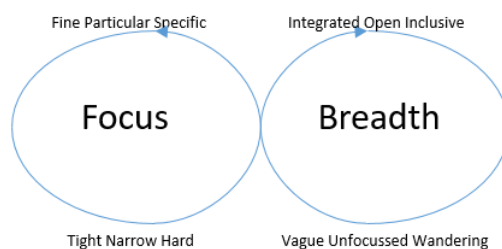
Anapanasati

Stage 11: Concentrating the mind | breath in / out

- In this stage we refine our focus to a point of experience
 - typically where the breath first enters the body: the clearest and most precise point of focus
 - Alternatively: abdomen – where we experience the breath beginning: more grounding
 - Or Heart: less physical sensation, but more connected to feelings and emotions
- This brings clarity and precision to our awareness

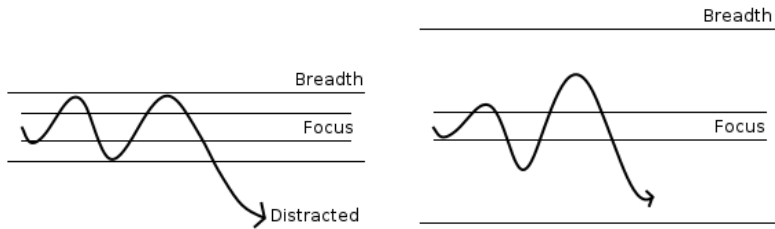
Breadth & Focus

- The point of focus needs to be balanced with a broad awareness of sensations, feelings, and mental activity
- Too tight a focus
 - Excluding aspects of our experience – which then seek re-entry as hindrance
 - Tendency to wilfulness, headaches, tension in the body
 - Builds up a resistance to meditation
- Too slack a focus
 - Loss of clarity
 - Distraction (proliferation)
 - Restlessness
 - Vagueness (decay)
 - Torpor
- A balance of breadth and focus is precise, but also integrated. It leads to a deeper level of absorption, because we are meditating with all of ourselves.
- Balance can be integrative: including whatever sensations, feelings, and thoughts arise in to broad awareness and building one-pointedness.



Broad Band of Awareness

- Breadth gives us a band of awareness within which our attention can wander without becoming completely distracted and losing our sense of purpose altogether.
- If our band of awareness is not broad enough, we will become distracted
- With a broad band of awareness we are able to accommodate a wandering attention and gently draw it back to the focus



Balanced Effort

- In sharpening our focus there is a danger of trying too hard: our effort becomes unbalanced.
- Balanced effort is a quantity: just sufficient to stay focused and a quality: interested, curious, persistent: not wilful or forced. Pliant but steady: a middle way between hard and soft.
- With this balanced approach we look for the quality of concentration and absorption that is present and do what we can to deepen it.
- 'Concentration' suggests deliberate effort: 'Absorption' suggests effortlessness, a quality of depth and breadth with nothing excluded or left out.

Stage 12: Liberating the mind | breath in/out

- This stage is very like just sitting, but with a continuing thread of attention on the breath.
- One attends to whatever arises, unfolds, and ceases within a broad inclusive awareness
- This includes sensations, feelings, volitions, thoughts:
 - We allow these to arise and pass on a moment-by-moment basis:
 - We hear, but don't listen to sounds
 - We see but don't look at sights, with a relaxed gaze
- We do not deliberately evaluate or judge what we experience in this stage.
 - This is easier said than done:
 - We may be aware of evaluations and judgements arising, and perhaps recognize a compulsion to evaluate/judge which we can't stop
 - Becoming aware of this tendency will free it up
 - When we can, we let go of evaluations/judgements, allowing them to pass away so that we can experience sensations, thoughts, feelings, just as they are in themselves

Experience tends to be overlaid with

1. Concepts: the veil of views
2. Attachments: the veil of klesas: greed, hatred and delusion: likes and dislikes.

When we allow these to drop away, everything reveals itself just as it is:

"In the seen there is just the seen" (Ud)

"The Great Way is not difficult for those who are not attached to preferences ... when love and hate are both absent, everything becomes clear and undisguised" (Hsin-Hsin Ming)

- The overlaying of concept and attachment is driven by habitual self-referencing: we interpret/judge/evaluate experience in terms of ourselves: Like/Dislike; Criticize/Complement; For/Against; Self-confident/anxious.
- This is self-referencing: a process of interpretation and discrimination which we can't stop.
- We can slow it down, and it may drop away so that things reveal themselves as they are
- This liberates the mind from the imposition of concepts and attachments

Eyes Open or Closed?

- Closed: good for
 - Freedom from visual disturbance
 - Interiority
 - Awareness of feelings

But can lead to

- Mental preoccupation
- Fantasy
- Drowsiness leading to sloth and torpor
- Open: good for
 - Countering mental preoccupation, fantasy, drowsiness
 - Clarity
 - Openness to visual sensation

But can lead to

- Distraction, if concentration is not fully established

In stage 12 we recommend eyes open to be open to whatever sensations arise.

Keep the gaze relaxed, focused on the space in the middle distance in front of you, not focused on anything in particular, not looking around at things