



breath + deeper states of meditation

Absorbed in the Breath

How to use the breath to develop the four levels of jhana —deeper states of meditation

- Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

Jhana (a Sanskrit word) means to be absorbed or focused in a single object, as when we work with the breath as our object in meditation.

THE FIRST JHANA HAS FIVE FACTORS:

1. **Directed thought:** Think of the breath until you can recognize it clearly without getting distracted.
2. **Singleness of object:** Keep the mind with the breath. Don't let it stray after other objects. Watch over your thoughts so that they deal only with the breath until the breath becomes comfortable. (The mind becomes one, at rest with the breath.)
3. **Evaluation:** Let this comfortable breath sensation spread and coordinate with the other breath sensations in the body. Let these breath sensations spread until they all flow together. Once the body has been soothed by the breath, feelings of pain will grow calm. The body will be filled with good breath energy. These three qualities must be brought to bear on the same stream of breathing for the first jhana to arise. This stream of breathing can then take you all the way to the fourth jhana. Directed thought, singleness of object, and evaluation act as the causes. When the causes are ripe, results will appear.
4. **Rapture:** a compelling sense of fullness and refreshment for body and mind, going straight to the heart, independent of all else.
5. **Pleasure:** physical ease arising from the body's being still and unperturbed; mental contentment arising from the mind's being at ease on its own, unperturbed, serene, and exultant. Rapture and pleasure are the results. The factors of the first jhana thus come down to two sorts: causes and results.

As rapture and pleasure grow stronger, the breath becomes more subtle. The longer you stay

focused, the more powerful the results become. This enables you to set directed thought and evaluation (the preliminary groundclearing) aside, and—relying completely on a single factor, singleness of object—you enter the second jhana.

THE SECOND JHANA HAS THREE FACTORS:

rapture, pleasure, and singleness of object. Rapture and pleasure become stronger in the second jhana because they rely on a single cause, singleness of object, which looks after the work from here on in: focusing on the breath so that it becomes more and more refined, keeping steady and still with a sense of refreshment and ease for both body and mind. The mind is even more stable and intent than before. As you continue focusing, rapture and pleasure grow stronger and begin to pulsate. Continue focusing on the breath, moving the mind deeper to a more subtle level to escape the motions of rapture and pleasure, and you enter the third jhana.

THE THIRD JHANA HAS TWO FACTORS:

pleasure and singleness of object. The body is quiet, motionless, and solitary. No feelings of pain arise to disturb it. The mind is solitary and still. The breath is refined, free flowing, and broad. A radiance—white, like cotton wool—pervades the entire body, stilling all feelings of physical and mental discomfort. The breath fills the body. Mindfulness fills the body.

Focus on in: The mind is bright and powerful, the body is light. Feelings of pleasure are still. Your sense of the body feels steady and even, with no slips or gaps in your awareness, so you can let go of your sense of pleasure. Singleness of object, the cause, has the strength to focus more heavily down, taking you to the fourth jhana.

THE FOURTH JHANA HAS TWO FACTORS:

equanimity and singleness of object, or mindfulness-solid, stable, and sure. The breath

property is absolutely quiet and still, free of ripples and gaps, like an ocean free of currents or waves. The mind, neutral and still, lets go of all preoccupations with past and future. The present is neutral and still. This is true singleness of object, focused on the unperturbed stillness of the breath. All aspects of the breath energy in the body connect so that you can breathe through every pore. You don't have to breathe through the nostrils because the in-and-out breath and the other aspects of the breath in the body form a single, unified whole—even and full. Mindfulness and alertness converge into one, giving rise to great energy that can dispel all inner darkness.

Breath Moves Body

Stillness in meditation refers to the mind, not a rigidly stiff body

- Will Johnson

We live in a world in which everything moves. Yet the first thing I invariably notice when I look out over a roomful of sitting meditators is how still almost everyone is, holding themselves as though the goal of the practice is to become like a stone garden statue of the Buddha. Granted, the practice is relatively still. But as a value applied to the practice of meditation, stillness refers only to a quality of mind, not to a rigidly stiff body. If you are truly able to relax in your sitting posture, subtle movements can be felt throughout the entire body in response to each breath you take. When you allow these natural motions to occur, your mind becomes calmer and bodily sensations come more alive. But if you brace yourself against them and become frozen in your posture, your mind gets stirred and your body loses touch with its feeling presence.

The Satipatthana Sutta describes a progression of mileposts in one's evolving sensitivity to the action of breath. Starting out from a place that watches the breath just at the front of the body, we're gradually guided to become more sensitive to all breath's nuances and are eventually led to the suggestion to "breathe through the whole body." To better understand how to breathe with the conscious participation of the whole body, nothing is more helpful than to recognize

that, in a deeply relaxed body, the force of breath can cause the entire body to remain in a state of subtle, constant, fluid motion.

The Mechanics of Breath

The action of breath is primarily initiated through the repetitive contraction and relaxation of the diaphragm, the dome-shaped muscle that separates your chest cavity from your abdomen and functions as a pump that draws oxygen-rich air into your body on the inhalation and expels the waste products of respiration on every exhalation. The rhythmic movement of the diaphragm generates a propulsive force similar to the force that causes waves to move through a body of water. But what we tend to do is resist the force of the breath by introducing tension into the musculature and effectively freezing the body at its joints.

Tension in the body always causes some degree of stillness at the nearest skeletal joint, and areas of frozen stillness always resist the force of breath that wants to pass through that part of the body. Simply put, when you tense your body, you become still; when you relax your body, everything can start to move again in response to the natural flow of the breath.

While stillness—and resistance to the force of the breath—can exist anywhere in the body, it's particularly evident in the head and neck. But when we hold our head completely still in meditation, we draw tension into the upper back, neck, and cranium, and this pattern of tension keeps fueling the silent parade of thoughts that pass through the mind. So when we stiffen our neck to the extent that our head becomes unmoving, we inadvertently support the very process of semi-conscious thought that the practice wants to help us slow down, perhaps even dissolve.

Breath wants to liberate itself, to free itself from its encasing in the body's frozen stillness. The whole of the body wants to keep moving—not even a single little part left out, everything in motion, just like the universe.
