SN 54.6 — Arittha Sutta: To Arittha

English translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

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Source revision: sha256:7c411108530c04aafcca0ac43267ed12227cbb2653320e8ae0bb686e566bb783

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Changes: Presentation only: original HTML markup reflowed into plain text; wording, numbering and source repetitions retained. No repetitions expanded.

Completeness: ABBREVIATED. Every source-unit character is preserved, including introductions, notes and verse structure. Thanissaro's collection-level note explicitly states that repetitions were cut: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/about.html. This is evidence about the translation method, not an assertion that every individual unit contains an omission; no repetitions reconstructed.

Text

At Savatthi. There the Blessed One said, "Monks, do you develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing?"

When this was said, Ven. Arittha replied to the Blessed One, "I develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, lord."

"But how do you develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, Arittha?"

"Having abandoned sensual desire for past sensual pleasures, lord, having done away with sensual desire for future sensual pleasures, and having thoroughly subdued perceptions of irritation with regard to internal & external events, I breathe in mindfully and breathe out mindfully."[1]

"There is that mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, Arittha. I don't say that there isn't. But as to how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is brought in detail to its culmination, listen and pay close attention. I will speak."

"As you say, lord," Ven. Arittha responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said, "And how, Arittha, is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing brought in detail to its culmination? There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore.[2] Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

"[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' [3] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.'[3] He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' [4] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.'[4] He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

"[5] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.' [6] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.' [7] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.'[5] He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.' [8] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.'

"[9] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.' [10] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in satisfying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out satisfying the mind.' [11] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in steadying the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out steadying the mind.' [12] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in releasing the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out releasing the mind.'[6]

"[13] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.' [14] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on dispassion.'[7] He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.' [15] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on cessation.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on cessation.' [16] He trains himself, 'I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.'

"This, Arittha, is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is brought in detail to its culmination."

Notes

1.

The Commentary reads this statement as indicating that Arittha has attained the third level of Awakening, non-return, but it is also possible to interpret the statement on a more mundane level: Arittha is simply practicing mindfulness in the present moment, having temporarily subdued desire for past and future sensual pleasures, and having temporarily subdued any thought of irritation with regard to the present.

2.

To the fore (parimukham): The Abhidhamma takes an etymological approach to this term, defining it as around (pari-) the mouth (mukham). In the Vinaya, however, it is used in a context (Cv.V.27.4) where it undoubtedly means the front of the chest. There is also the possibility that the term could be used idiomatically as "to the front," which is how I have translated it here.

3.

The commentaries insist that "body" here means the breath, but this is unlikely in this context, for the next step — without further explanation — refers to the breath as "bodily fabrication." If the Buddha were using two different terms to refer to the breath in such close proximity, he would have been careful to signal that he was redefining his terms (as he does below, when explaining that the first four steps in breath meditation correspond to the practice of focusing on the body in and of itself as a frame of reference). The step of breathing in and out sensitive to the entire body relates to the many similes in the suttas depicting jhana as a state of whole-body awareness (see MN 119).

4.

"In-&-out breaths are bodily; these are things tied up with the body. That's why in-&-out breaths are bodily fabrications." — MN 44.

5.

"Perceptions & feelings are mental; these are things tied up with the mind. That's why perceptions & feelings are mental fabrications." — MN 44.

6.

AN 9.34 shows how the mind, step by step, is temporarily released from burdensome mental states of greater and greater refinement as it advances through the stages of jhana.

7.

Lit., "fading."

See also: MN 118; SN 54.8.