

The Place of Observing the Breath in *Ānāpānassati* Meditation

There is a controversy and confusion among Buddhists about the place of observing the breath during the meditation of the mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānassati*) and also about the word **'body'** (*kāya*)—as in the phrase “experiencing the entire body” (*sabba-kāya paṭisaṃvedī*)—whether it refers to the actual physical body or not. In order to clarify these issues, the present paper attempts to shed some light by quoting and discussing canonical, post-canonical and commentarial passages starting first with the *Ānāpānassati-sutta* and *Kimila-sutta* as expounded by the Buddha himself.

The Place of Observing the Breath

The very place where the in-and-out-breathing should be observed and mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānassati*) should be established is defined by the Buddha at the very start of this meditation thus:

“Establishing mindfulness at **parimukhaṃ**, ever mindful he breathes in, | “*Parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā, so*
mindful he breathes out”. | *satova assasati, satova passasati.*”
(e.g. MN 10. *Satipaṭṭhānasuttaṃ*; MN 118, *Ānāpānassati-suttaṃ*)

In this meditation the Buddha does not indicate any other place, such as chest (*ura*), belly (*udara, kucchi*), etc. but only **parimukha** with the emphasis of establishing, placing and fixing (*upaṭṭhapetvā*) one’s mindfulness there, implying thus of not moving it hither and thither.

But what is *parimukha*? Why does the Buddha tell to establish (*upaṭṭhapetvā*) one’s mindfulness at *parimukha*? This instruction is in contrast with other meditations, such as the attention to the elements of the body (*dhātu-manasikāra*) and attention to the foulness of the body (*paṭikkūla-manasikāra*), where emphasis is placed on reviewing (*paccavekkhana*) the whole physical body from top to toe, and where the attention (*manasikāra*) can be moved and shifted to different parts of the body thus:

“A bhikkhu reviews (*paccavekkhati*) this **body** (*kāya*) up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, bounded by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: ‘In this body there are head-hairs, bodyhairs, nails, ...’, etc.,

or,

“A bhikkhu reviews (*paccavekkhati*) this same body (*kāya*), however it is placed, however disposed, as consisting of elements thus: ‘In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.’”

“*Bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ uddhaṃ pādatalā, adho kesamatthakā, tacapariyantam pūram nānappakārassa asucino paccavekkhati: ‘atthi imasmim kāye kesā lomā nakhā ...’*”

“*Bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ yathāṭṭhitam yathā-pañihitam dhātuso paccavekkhati – ‘atthi imasmim kāye pathavīdhātu āpodhātu tejodhātu vāyodhātū’ti.*”

During this kind of meditations one doesn’t practice “mindfulness of breathing” (*ānāpānassati*) but mindfulness of other parts of the fleshy body by reviewing it (*paccavekkhati*) but not establishing (*upaṭṭhapetvā*) one’s mindfulness at *parimukha*. Especially if one follows the inhaling air inside the body as it travels in different

parts, one would then be practicing elements meditation (*dhātu-manasikāra*) in regard to the air element (*vāyo-dhātu*) but not "mindfulness of breathing".

What is then *parimukha*? Why does the Buddha tell to establish (*upaṭṭhapetvā*) one's mindfulness at *parimukha*?

Here, grammatically and etymologically, the crucial Pāli word *parimukhaṃ* is derived from the prefix *pari* and the noun *mukha*, thus we have two words: *pari+mukha*.

According to Pāli Grammas, *pari* has the meaning of 1. 'around' (*pari = samanta*) or 2. 'all around' (*pari = samantato*). (*Kaccāyanabyākaraṇaṃ*, § 656; *Moggallāna pañcika ṭikā*, *Catutthakaṇḍa*, §120)

The PTS Pāli-English Dictionary too splits *parimukhaṃ* into *pari+mukha*, and says under *pari*: prefix, signifying (lit.) around, round about; (fig.) all around, i.e. completely, altogether. Here is a screenshot of it:

Pari° (indecl.) [Idg. *peri to verbal root *per, fix), Goth. fair, Ohg. fir, far=Ger. ver —] prefix, signifying (lit.) around, round about; (fig.) all round, i. e. completely, altogether.

Sanskrit Dictionaries do the same, as in this screenshot from Sanskrit-English Dict. by Monier-Williams:

परि *pāri*, ind. round, around, about, round about; fully, abundantly, richly (esp. ibc. [where also *pārī*] to express fulness or high degree), RV.

As to the word '*mukha*', Pāli grammars give the literal meaning as *mukhaṃ = lapaṇaṃ* (the mouth; speech, muttering). (*Moggallānabyākaraṇaṃ*, *Sattamo kaṇḍo*, § 31); or *mukhaṃ = vadane* (the face; speech; utterance) (*Abhidhānappadīpikā*, § 913). See also PTS P-E Dictionary under *lapana* and *vadana*.

The PTS P-E Dictionary too gives the first and literal meaning of *mukha* as 'the mouth' providing also a similar but more thorough etymology. It also gives extending meanings of *mukha*, such as **2.** the face, thus:

Mukha (nt.) [Vedic mukha, fr. Idg. *mu, onomat., cp. Lat. mu facere, Gr. मुखάομαι, Mhg. mūgen, Lat. mūgio to moo (of cows), to make the sound "moo"; Ohg. māwen to cry.]
1. the mouth 2. the face

Sanskrit Dictionaries do the same, as in these screenshots from 'Online Sanskrit Dictionary',

मुख (mukha) = mouth
मुखं (mukhaM) = mouth

and the Sanskrit-English Dict. by Monier-Williams:

मुख mukha, n. (m., g. ardharcâdi; ifc. ā or ī, cf. Pāṇ. iv, 1, 54, 58) the mouth, face, countenance, R.V. &c. &c.; the beak of a bird, snout or muzzle of an animal. GrS. : Mn. : MBh. &c.

Therefore, in accordance with the above explanations, *pari+mukha* means 'around the mouth or the face'. A similar explanation is given in the Pāli-Sinhala Dictionary by Buddhadatta thus: 'in front of the face' (පරිමුඛං මුණ ඉදිරියෙනි)

The Sanskrit-English Dict. by Monier-Williams gives the meaning of *parimukha* as "round or about the face":

परिमुखम् pari-mukham, ind. round or about the face.

Thus it can be concluded that the place of *parimukham* is not at other part of the body, such as chest, belly, etc., but "around or in front of the face or mouth". Needless to say, the prominent part **around** or **near** the face or mouth is the **nose** as the chief organ of entrance to the respiratory tract, from where one breathes in and breathes out, that is, the part of the face that sticks out above the mouth, used for breathing and smelling things. And as mindfulness of breathing has to do with watching the breath, it is obviously in this area that a meditator should establish his mindfulness and know the in- and out-breaths, and the long and short in- and out-breaths, etc.,

The Pāli Commentaries remark, thus, that one places mindfulness near the mouth (*mukha-samīpe vā katvā*),¹ which the MN Subcommentary explains this to mean "at the **nose tip** or the **upper lip**" (*nāsikagge vā uttarotṭhe vā*).² This explanation is originally found in the Abhidhamma book *Vibhaṅga-pāḷi* where the definition of "establishing mindfulness at *parimukham*" is given thus:

"This mindfulness is established, well established at **the nose tip** (*nāsik'agge*) or at the **mark of the mouth** (*mukhanimitte*). Hence it is said: 'Establishing mindfulness at **parimukham**.'"

(*Vibhaṅga-pāḷi, Jhāna-vibhaṅgo* § 537)

"*Ayaṃ sati upaṭṭhitā hoti supaṭṭhitā nāsikagge vā mukhanimitte vā. Tena vucati: 'Parimukham satim upaṭṭhapetvā.'*"

Here, as the term '**the nose tip** (*nāsik'agge*)' is intelligible, the term "mark of the mouth" (*mukhanimitta*) is explained by the *Vibhaṅga* Commentary thus:

"'**Mark of the mouth**' should be known here as the middle area of the upper lip where the air strikes."

(*Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā, Jhānavibhaṅgo*)

"**Mukhanimittan**'ti cettha uttar'otṭhassa vemajjha-ppadeso daṭṭhabbo, yattha nāsika-vāto paṭihaññati."



mark of the mouth
(*mukha-nimitta*)

As to why two places—the "nose tip" and the "mark of the mouth" (upper lip)—are mentioned, is explained in Pāli Commentaries that this is due to the those who have long nose or short nose. Thus it is said:

¹ This explanation is found in the Commentary of Dīgha-, Majjhima-, Saṃyutta-, Aṅguttara-nikāya; Udāna, and Vibhaṅga, etc.

² Subcommentary of Majjhima-nikāya: "*Mukha-samīpe*'ti mukhassa samīpe nāsikagge vā uttarotṭhe vā."

“These in-breaths and out-breaths occur striking the nostrils [tip of the nose] in a **long-nosed** man (*dīgha-nāsika*) and the upper lip (*uttar’oṭṭham*) in a **short-nosed** man (*rassa-nāsika*). So he should fix the mark thus: ‘This is the place where they strike!’”

(*Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā, Ānāpānassatisamādhikathā*)³

“*Ime hi [assāsapassāsā] dīghanāsikassa nāsā-putaṃ ghaṭṭentā pavattanti, rassanāsikassa uttar’oṭṭham. Tasm’ānena imaṃ nāma ṭhānaṃ ghaṭṭentī’ti nimittaṃ ṭhapetabbaṃ.*”

The same two places are also mentioned in the canonical commentary *Paṭisambhidāmagga* with the additional clarification that the breaths should not be followed inside or outside the body:

“In this way, a bhikkhu sits down by establishing mindfulness at **the nose tip** (*nāsik’agge*) or at the **mark of the mouth** [i.e. the upper lip]. He does not give attention to the in-breaths coming inside [the body] or the out-breaths going outside [the body].”

(*Paṭisambhidāmagga, Ānāpānassatikathā*)

“*Evamevaṃ bhikkhu nāsik’agge vā mukha-nimitte vā satim upaṭṭhapetvā nis-inno hoti. Na āgate vā gate vā assāsa-passāse manasi karoti.*”

Here, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* Commentary explains further:

“‘**Coming inside**’ means: coming inside from the touching point [of the nose tip or upper lip] onwards. ‘**Going outside**’ means: going outside from the touching point [of the nose tip or upper lip] onwards.”

(*Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā, Vodānañāṇaniddesavaṇṇanā*)

“*Āgate’ti phuṭṭha-ṭṭhānato abhantaram āgate. Gate’ti phuṭṭha-ṭṭhānato bahiddhā gate.*”

In this way the Buddha advises:

“Let your mindfulness of breathing be well established in one’s own person **at parimukhaṃ**. ... When mindfulness of breathing is well established in one’s own person **at parimukhaṃ**, any inclinations for outward and vexing thoughts cease to exist.”

(*Itivuttaka, Asubhānupassī-suttaṃ*)

“*Ānāpānassati ca vo ajjhattaṃ parimukhaṃ sūpaṭṭhitā hotu. ... Ānāpānassatiyā ajjhattaṃ parimukhaṃ sūpaṭṭhitāya ye bāhirā vitakkāsayā vighāta-pakkhikā, te na hontī.*”

This means that ‘inclinations for outward and vexing thoughts’ (*bāhirā vitakkāsayā vighāta-pakkhikā*) will arise if one does not establish one’s mindfulness at *parimukhaṃ* but moves it hither and thither. Although these explanations are brief, the *Vinaya* Commentary gives the reasons why a meditator should establish one’s mindfulness at *parimukhaṃ* and, in order to avoid vexing and distracted thoughts, he should not follow the breaths in the chest, and navel. It says:

“If he takes the nose-tip as the beginning of the air entering in, the heart [chest] as its middle and the navel as its end, and if he follows after that, his mind is distracted by disquiet and perturbation.

He, however, sits down with mindfulness on the mark [*nimitta* – the nose tip or upper lip] at that same place, and follows with mindfulness the beginning, middle and end of the in-breaths and out-breaths at the place touched by them as they come and go; keeping his mind fixed there, he then sees them without moving from this place in order to discern them.”

(*Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā, Ānāpānassatisamādhikathā*)

“*Abhantarapavisanavātassa nāsikaggaṃ ādi, hadayaṃ majjhaṃ, nābhi pariyosānaṃ, tañcassa anugacchato vikkhepagataṃ cittaṃ sāraddhāya ceva hoti iñjanāya ca.*

Nimitte satiyā nisinna kamena āgacchantānañca gacchantānañca phuṭṭhaṭṭhāne assāsapassāsānaṃ ādimajjhapariyosānaṃ satiyā anugacchanto tattha ca cittaṃ ṭhapento passati, na ca tesam dassanattaṃ byāvaṇṇaṃ hoti.”

³ Also in e.g. *Paṭisambhidāmagga* Commentary, *Visuddhimagga*, *Ānāpānassatikathā* (*dīgha-nāsiko nāsikagge,rassa-nāsiko uttar’oṭṭhe.*)

All these explanations are based on the verb the Buddha uses, namely, '**establish**' (*upaṭṭhapetvā*) mindfulness at *parimukhaṃ*. The verb 'establish' indicates the placing and fixing of one's mindfulness at *parimukhaṃ*, implying thus of not moving it hither and thither, or onwards and backwards to any other place. The opposite of 'establish' is 'disestablish, displace, change, move, remove' etc., which is not the case in *Ānāpānassati-samādhi*

The aim, however, in *Ānāpānassati-samādhi* is to acquire 'one-pointedness of the mind' (*cittassa ekaggatā*) and thus concentration (*samādhi*). These two words are synonymous, as the Buddha points out: "One acquires concentration, one acquires 'one-pointedness of the mind' (*labhati samādhiṃ, labhati cittassa ekaggataṃ*). (*Samyuttanikāya, Paṭhamavibhaṅgasutta*). He thus calls the Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation *Ānāpānassati-samādhi* (e.g. *Samyuttanikāya, Padīpopamasuttaṃ*).

As aforesaid, *Ānāpānassati-samādhi* differs from other meditations where the attention (*manasikāra*) can be moved and shifted to different parts of the body, such as attention to the foulness of the body (*paṭikkūla-manasikāra*) and attention to the elements of the body (*dhātu-manasikāra*), as it is said:

"A bhikkhu reviews (*paccavekkhati*) this body (*kāya*) ... thus: 'In this body there are head-hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, ... urine.', etc.,

or,

"A bhikkhu reviews (*paccavekkhati*) this same body (*kāya*), ... as consisting of elements thus: 'In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.'"

"*Bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ ...paccavekkhati: 'atthi imasmimṃ kāye kesā lomā nakhā ... muttaṃ'*"

"*Bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ ... dhātuso paccavekkhati – 'atthi imasmimṃ kāye pathavīdhātu āpodhātu tejodhātu vāyodhātū'ti.*"

The verb used here is 'review' (*paccavekkhati*), and verbs such as '**establish**' (*upaṭṭhapetvā*) mindfulness at this or other place do not occur as in *Ānāpānassati-samādhi* where the emphasis is establishing mindfulness at one place, namely at *parimukhaṃ*.

Hence, if for example one reviews the inhaling air how it travels in the chest, belly, etc., then one is practicing elements meditation (*dhātu-manasikāra*) in regard to the air element (*vāyo-dhātu*) but not "mindfulness of breathing". Even so, by reviewing the air element only, he doesn't even practise elements meditation fully, because as it is required to review the other three elements as well and to see their correlation. Therefore, it can't be said that he either practises "mindfulness of breathing" correctly or elements meditation correctly.

In-Breaths and Out-Breaths = A Body (Kāya)

In Majjhima Nikāya the Buddha calls the in-breaths and out-breaths a "body" (*kāya*), and the word "body" (*kāya*) occurs also in the meditation of the mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānassati*) as "experiencing the **entire body**" (*sabba-kāya paṭisaṃvedī*). Now, there is a confusion whether this 'body' refers to the actual physical body or not. In order to clarify this issue, the following points should be understood:

The Buddha says:

"I say that this is a certain body (*kāya*) among the bodies, namely, in-breaths and out-breaths."

(The Buddha in MN 118, *Ānāpānassati-suttaṃ* & *SN Kimila-suttaṃ*)

"*Kāyesu kāy'aññatar'āhaṃ, bhikkhave, evaṃ vadāmi, yadidaṃ, assāsapassāsā.*"

Here the Buddha equals the in-breaths and out-breaths with a certain “body” (*kāya*), and makes them thus identical in meaning. How should this be understood? How can the breaths be a body? And which are the other bodies of ‘among the bodies’ (*kāyesu*)?

The obvious answer is that the word “body” (*kāya*) is used here not in the *literal* but in the *figurative* sense or speech.

Literal vs. Figurative Speech

It should be noted that the Pāli word “body” (*kāya*), apart from the usual and literal meaning of the fleshy or physical body (*maṃsa-kāya*, *rūpa-kāya*), it has many other meanings in the *figurative* and collective sense, such as a “collection, group, aggregation, cluster, category, class, structure, process, function” etc., and in the above context it has the very technical meaning of “the *process* of taking in and expelling air (*vāyo*) during breathing”, that is, the *body* (process, aggregation) of *breath*.

Similar expressions in Pāli with a figurative meaning of the “body” (*kāya*) in the sense of “aggregation” are:

- mental body (*nāma-kāya*),⁴ body of contact (*phassa-kāya*),
- body of feeling (*vedanā-kāya*), body of perception (*saññā-kāya*),
- body of volition (*cetanā-kāya*), body of consciousness (*viññāṇa-kāya*),
- body of craving (*taṇhā-kāya*),⁵
- body of the earth element (*pathavī-kāya*), body of the water element (*āpo-kāya*),
- body of the fire element (*tejo-kāya*), body of the wind element (*vāyo-kāya*),⁶
- body of a language (*nirutti-kāya*), body of verses (*pada-kāya*),
- body of letters (*byañjana-kāya*),⁷ body of an army (*bala-kāya*),⁸ etc.

In English too, the word “body” can take various *figurative* meanings, such as a **group** of things or persons (e.g. a *body* of law, a *body* of doctrine, a *body* of precedents, a legislative *body*, the student *body*, the administrative *body*, heavenly *body*, celestial *body*); **main part** of something (e.g. the *body* of the text, the *body* of the message, the *body* of the car); a **collection** (e.g. a *body* of evidence/research/information/opinion); **aggregate** (e.g. a *body* of water), etc.

Therefore, since there are so many ways, literal or figurative, of calling something a “body”, the Buddha calls the in-breaths and out-breaths a certain “body” (*kāya*) and distinguishes them from other bodies, such as the fleshy or physical body (*maṃsa-kāya*, *rūpa-kāya*), the “body of contact” (*phassa-kāya*), the “body of feeling” (*vedanā-kāya*), etc. He thus calls them so because the process of breathing constitutes itself a different part in the physical body, namely, the bodily *process* of inhalation and exhalation, or the *aggregation* of wind (*vāyo-kāya*) inhaled and exhaled in respiration.

⁴ DN *Mahānidāna-suttaṃ*.

⁵ MN *Chachakka-suttaṃ*; SN *Khandhasamyuttaṃ*, *Upādānaparipavatta-suttaṃ* & *Sattaṭṭhāna-suttaṃ*.

⁶ DN *Samaññaphala-suttaṃ*, MN *Sandaka-suttaṃ* & SN *Mahādiṭṭhi-suttaṃ*.

⁷ *Pārājikakaṇḍa-aṭṭhakathā*

⁸ AN *Dhammika-suttaṃ*

Moreover, we know that the human body consists of specific systems, such as:

- Respiratory system– the organs used for breathing: the nose, pharynx, larynx, bronchi, lungs and diaphragm.
- Digestive system – salivary glands, oesophagus, stomach, liver, gallbladder, pancreas, intestines, rectum and anus.
- Cardiovascular system – heart and circulatory system.
- Urinary system – kidneys, ureters, bladder and urethra
- Integumentary system: skin, hair, fat, and nails.
- Skeletal system.
- Endocrine system.
- Lymphatic system.
- Nervous system.
- Muscular system.
- Reproductive system.

Hence among these systems the in- and out-breaths belong to the respiratory system, which obviously the Buddha calls a "body" (*kāya*) among bodies, i.e. a system among systems.

Experiencing the Entire **Body** (*sabba-kāya-paṭisaṃvedī*)

Now, the term "entire body" (*kāya*) in relation to the in- and out-breaths occurs in the meditation of the mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānassati*) as "experiencing the **entire body**" (*sabba-kāya paṭisaṃvedī*). There the Buddha says:

"He trains thus: I shall breathe in experiencing the **entire body** (*sabba-kāya-paṭisaṃvedī*); he trains thus: I shall breathe out experiencing the **entire body**." (e.g. MN 10. *Satipaṭṭhānasuttaṃ*; MN 118, *Ānāpānassatisuttaṃ*)

"*Sabba-kāya-paṭisaṃvedī assāsissā-mī'ti sikkhati; sabba-kāya-paṭisaṃvedī passāsissā-mī'ti sikkhati.*"

But what does then the Buddha mean here? Does he mean 'experiencing the entire physical, fleshy body with its excrement, urine, blood, bones, intestines, rectum, anus, skin, hair, fat, and nails'? That is, the digestive system, cardiovascular system, urinary system, etc., or does he mean the respiratory system which is related to breathing?

The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* indicates that the Buddha means here the respiratory system which is related to breathing and not to other systems or 'bodies'. It uses the Buddha's own words that the in- and out-breaths (*assāsa-passāsā*) are a "body" (*kāya*). Thus it says:

"Experiencing the entire body means: the in- and out-breaths (*assāsa-passāsā*) are the "body" (*kāya*).

"*Sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī: assāsapassāsā kāyo.*"

"Thus, he experiences the entire body by means of the in-breaths (*assāsā*) ... and experiences the entire body by means of the out-breaths (*passāsā*).

"*Sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assāsavasena... sabbakāyapaṭi-saṃvedī passāsavase-na...*"

“Experiencing the entire body by means of the in- and out-breaths (*assāsa-passāsā*) the mind attains one-pointedness (*cittassa ekaggatam*).”
(Paṭisambhidāmagga, Ānāpānassatikathā) | *Sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assāsapassā-savasena cittassa ekaggatam.”*

The Vinaya Commentary and also many other Commentaries use the Buddha’s own words that the in- and out-breaths (*assāsa-passāsā*) are a “body” (*kāya*). They then call them the ‘in-breath body’ (*assāsa-kāya*) and ‘out-breath body’ (*passāsa-kāya*) and explain the term ‘experiencing the **entire body**’ thus:

“I shall breathe in making known, making discernible, the beginning, middle and end of the **entire in-breath body** (*assāsa-kāya*).

“Sakalassa assāsakāyassa ādimajjhapariyosānaṃ viditaṃ karonto pākaṭaṃ karonto “assasissāmī”ti sikkhati.

“I shall breathe out making known, making discernible, the beginning, middle and end of the **entire out-breath body** (*passāsa-kāya*),” thus he trains.

Sakalassa passāsakāyassa ādimajjhapariyosānaṃ viditaṃ karonto pākaṭaṃ karonto “passasissāmī”ti sikkhati.

Thus making them known, making them clear, he both breathes in and breathes out with a mind associated with knowledge,”

Evaṃ viditaṃ karonto pākaṭaṃ karonto ñāṇasampayutta-cittena assasati ceva passasati ca.”

(e.g. *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā, Ānāpānassatisamādhikathā*)

However, as abovementioned, the Vinaya Commentary, as well as other Commentaries, clarify that the beginning, middle and end of the entire breath body should be observed at *parimukha*, which they call the ‘mark’ (*nimitta* – the nose tip or upper lip), and that one should establish and fix one’s mindfulness there at the touching point. They say:

“He sits down with mindfulness on the mark [*nimitta* – the nose tip or upper lip] at that same place, and follows with mindfulness the beginning, middle and end of the in-breaths and out-breaths at the place touched by them as they come and go; keeping his mind fixed there, he then sees them without moving from this place in order to discern them.”⁹

“Nimitte satiyā nisinno kamena āgacchantānañca gacchantānañca phuṭṭhaṭṭhāne assāsapassāsānaṃ ādimajjhapariyosānaṃ satiyā anugacchanto tattha ca cittaṃ ṭhapento passati, na ca tesam dassanattham byāvaṭo hoti.”

At this stage, therefore, the meditator should have clear knowledge of each in-and-out breath through the three phases of its beginning, middle, and end at *parimukha*. Thus “entire” means not part but ‘beginning, middle and end’ of the Breath at the ***parimukha***, which can increase his concentration.

On the other hand, part of the breath means: only beginning, only middle, only end; or only beginning and middle, only middle and end, only beginning and end. This means also that the meditator’s mindfulness is weak by being unable to comprehend the “entire body of breath” and thus increase his concentration.

Therefore, if rightly translated, the abovementioned passage in *Ānāpānassati Sutta* should be translated thus:

⁹ *Vinaya-aṭṭhakathā, Ānāpānassatisamādhikathā; Paṭisambhidāmagga-aṭṭhakathā, Satokāriñāṇaniddesavaṇṇanā.*

“He trains thus: I shall breathe in experiencing the **entire body (of in-breath)**.

“*Sabba-kāya-paṭisaṃvedī assasissā-mī’ti sikkhati.*”

He trains thus: I shall breathe out experiencing the **entire body (of out-breath)**.” (e.g. MN 10. *Satipaṭṭhānasuttaṃ*; MN 118, *Ānāpānassatisuttaṃ*)

Sabba-kāya-paṭisaṃvedī passasis-sāmī’ti sikkhati.”

Consequently, in contrast to other meditations, such as elements meditation, etc., which take the whole physical body as an object, the object of mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpāna-satī*) is nothing else but the process of the breath which the Buddha figuratively calls “body”. He also specifies the particular place of establishing this mindfulness, namely, at *parimukkha*, explained on above. It is thus this very object of the “breath body” one must concentrate on to develop “**concentration** by mindfulness of breathing” (*ānāpānassati-samādhi*), which the Buddha extols more than any other concentration as ‘noble abiding’ (*ariya-vihāra*), ‘Brahma abiding’ (*brahma-vihāra*), and ‘the Tathāgata’s abiding’ (*Tathāgata-vihāra*).¹⁰

Tranquillizing the Bodily *saṅkhāra* (*passambhayaṃ kāya-saṅkhāraṃ*)

In the next part of *Ānāpānassati Sutta* the Buddha also employs the word ‘body’ (*kāya*) but with the term ‘*kāya-saṅkhāraṃ*’. Thus he says:

“He trains thus: ‘Tranquillizing the bodily *saṅkhāra*, I shall breathe in ... I shall breathe out.’”

(e.g. MN 10. *Satipaṭṭhānasuttaṃ*; MN 118, *Ānāpānassati-suttaṃ*)

“*Passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ assasissā-mī’ti ... passasissā-mī’ti sikkhati.*”

The term ‘bodily (*kāya-*) *saṅkhāra*’ has in other contexts the meaning of volitional activity of the body (*kāya*), when it is connected with the ‘verbal (*vacī*) - *saṅkhāra*’. Here, however, as rightly stated in the *Buddhist Dictionary*, it is used in a quite different sense, namely as **bodily function**, i.e. **in-and-out-breathing** [*assāsa-passāsā*] (e.g. M. 10; M. 44).¹¹

This sense is defined in two Suttas thus:

“**In-breaths and out-breaths** ... are a **bodily function** (*kāya-saṅkhāro*); ... these states are bodily, are connected with the body; that is why in-breaths and out-breaths are a bodily function.”

(MN 44, *Cūḷa-vedalla-suttaṃ*; SN *Dutiya-kāmaḥhū-suttaṃ*)

“*Assāsapassāsā ... kāya-saṅkhāro. ... Kāyikā ete dhammā, kāya-ppaṭi-baddhā, tasmā assāsapassāsā kāya-saṅkhāro.*”

Hence bodily function (*kāya-saṅkhāro*) does not mean here that one trains to tranquillize the bodily functions of defecating, urinating, digesting, reproducing, etc. That is, one doesn’t train to tranquillize the digestive system, cardiovascular system, urinary system, etc., but does so on the respiratory system which is related to breathing.

The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* indicates that the Buddha means here the respiratory system which is related to breathing and not to other systems or ‘bodies’. It uses the Buddha’s own words that the in- and out-breaths (*assāsa-passāsā*) are a “body” (*kāya*), and also the words of the abovementioned two Suttas in MN and SN. It says:

¹⁰ SN *Ānāpāna-samyuttaṃ, Icchānaṅgala-suttaṃ.*

¹¹ Ven. Ñāṇatiloka’s *Buddhist Dictionary* : *saṅkhāra*.

“What is the **bodily function** (*kāya-saṅkhāro*)? Long in-breaths are bodily. These states are connected with the body and are **bodily functions** (*kāya-saṅkhārā*). ... Long out-breaths are bodily. These states are connected with the body and are **bodily functions** (*kāya-saṅkhārā*). ...

“The in-breaths of **experiencing the entire body** (*sabba-kāya-paṭisaṃvedī*) and the out-breaths of experiencing the whole body (*sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī*) are bodily. These states are connected with the body and are **bodily functions** (*kāya-saṅkhārā*).

‘One experiences the **entire body** by means of in-breaths and out-breaths’
(*Paṭisambhidāmagga, Satokāri-ñāṇa-niddeso*)

“*Katamo kāyasaṅkhāro? Dīghaṃ assāsā kāyikā. Ete dhammā kāyapaṭibaddhā kāyasaṅkhārā. ... Dīghaṃ passāsā kāyikā. Ete dhammā kāyapaṭibaddhā kāyasaṅkhārā. ...*

Sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assāsā sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī passāsā kāyikā. Ete dhammā kāya-paṭibaddhā kāyasaṅkhārā.

Sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assāsapassāsavasena”

Therefore, if rightly translated, the abovementioned passage in *Ānāpānassati Sutta* should be translated thus:

“He trains thus: ‘Tranquillizing the bodily function (of in-breath), I shall breathe in.

‘Tranquillizing the bodily function (of out-breath), I shall breathe out.’

(e.g. MN 118, *Ānāpānassati-suttam*; MN 10. *Satipaṭṭhānasuttam*)

“*Passambhayaṃ kāya-saṅkhāraṃ assasissā-mī’ti ... passasissāmī’ti sikkhati.*”

The Majjhima Nikāya Commentary (*Papañcasūdanī*) explains “experiencing the whole body” (*sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī*) as signifying that the meditator becomes aware of each in-breath and out-breath through its three phases of ‘beginning, middle, and end’ at *parimukha*.