

The Ancient Theravāda Meditation System, *Borān Kammatṭhāna*: *Ānāpānasati* or ‘Mindfulness of The Breath’ in Kammatthan Majjima Baeb Lamdub

ANDREW SKILTON AND PHIBUL CHOOMPOLPAISAL

KING’S COLLEGE LONDON

andrew.skilton@kcl.ac.uk; phibul.choompolpaisal@kcl.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

In Thailand the pre-reform Theravāda meditation system, *borān kammatṭhāna*, is now practised only by small and isolated groups. To promote detailed comparative study of *borān kammatṭhāna*, the tradition of it taught at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi, is explored through a translation of a text on *ānāpānasati* attributed to Suk Kaitheun, the head of its lineage. This is followed by a detailed discussion and comparison with the description of the same technique in the *Visuddhimagga*. Some close connections between these two sources are identified and it is speculated that, despite features concerning *nimittas*, bodily location, terminology etc. that are diagnostically distinctive for *borān kammatṭhāna*, its method for *ānāpānasati* can be seen as a rational development of earlier techniques advocated by Buddhaghosa.

Keywords

mindfulness of breath, *ānāpānasati*, *borān kammatṭhāna*, meditation, *nimitta*, Suk Kaitheun, Wat Ratchasittharam

Despite appearances to the contrary, the majority of contemporary Theravāda meditation practices are of relatively recent construction. They stem from a variety of reform movements that emerged in Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka from the early nineteenth century onwards and are based usually on textual models. The selection of canonical texts for this function gives some reform meditations ancient roots and invokes the assumption of uninterrupted lineages transmitting ancient practices from the Buddha’s day to this.

What these reform meditations replaced, the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* or ‘ancient meditation’ tradition, is virtually unknown in mainstream western scholarship and has almost disappeared in Theravāda societies, although ongoing research by a few scholars (including the present authors) has revealed fragile traces of its continued practice in several places. Our understanding is that *borān kammaṭṭhāna* was the dominant meditation practice in most pre-reform Theravāda Buddhist countries, the mainstream meditation transmitted across most, if not all, of the Theravāda practice world in the pre-modern period.¹ Where it has emerged into the light of contemporary awareness, it has usually been dismissed or misunderstood (see Crosby 2013, 117).

As modern scholarly understanding of pre-reform Theravāda meditation and culture develops, it is increasingly desirable that we examine its meditation practices in detail.² This process has hardly begun to any significant degree, and in the present article the authors seek to build on a previous article on this area, by examining another facet of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* meditation in detail. Specifically, we will give a detailed description of the meditation procedure for developing ‘mindfulness of the breath’ *ānāpānasati* (Pali; Thai, *anapanasati*) as transmitted at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi, where one strand of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* is preserved.³ This temple transmits a lineage of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* taught by the fourth Rattanakosin *sangharat* (Thai; Pali, *saṅgharāja*; ‘Supreme Patriarch’), Suk Kaitheun (Somdet Yannasangvorn, 1733–1822). This lineage is known now as Kammaṭṭhan Majjima Baeb Lamdub, ‘Progressive (Mind-)Training in the Middle Way Employing Meditation Subjects’ (hereafter KMBL).

It is our preliminary assumption, supported by observation, that *borān kammaṭṭhāna* meditation was a complex religious phenomenon and that as such it was internally differentiated, having a number of lineages of teaching and practice which showed variations from one another.⁴ We also assume that Suk’s transmission participated in this variety, with the consequence that while what we describe is *representative* of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* meditation, it is not being offered as a *definitive* description. It is our hope that by beginning to describe the practice of KMBL in detail we will facilitate the further detailed examination of other strands of the *borān* meditation tradition preserved in other sources, and that this internal variety will be explored.

1. The only gap in the South East Asian record had been for Burma/Myanmar, but the recent identification of a Mon tradition of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* may signal the closure of that gap and provide evidence that it was practised across the whole of the region without exception. The present authors plan publication of this discovery in the near future.
2. Skilling 2014 includes an interesting discussion of a range of Ayutthaya period texts, i.e. Siamese Pali literature from the pre-reform period.
3. Thonburi is now a district of Bangkok, on the west bank of the Chao Phraya river, but after the fall of Ayutthaya to a Burmese army in 1767, became the new capital city of Siam, established by King Taksin. Following the death of Taksin the capital was moved by the first Chakri king, Yodfa, to the present centre on the east bank of the river.
4. This preliminary observation is based on comparison of a number of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* textual sources from Cambodia, Siam and Sri Lanka, as well as interviews with modern practitioners in Thonburi, Ayutthaya and Ratchaburi. A case can also be made that the modernist *dhammakaya* tradition of Wat Paknam, Wat Phra Dhammakaya and Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram transmits a simplified form of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* see note 51 below and Crosby 2013, 141.

This is the second such analysis we have conducted, the first being a close description of the first stage of the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* meditation cycle which is concerned with *pīti* (Pali; Thai, *peeti*, lit. ‘delight’, ‘joy’ or ‘pleasure’).⁵ In that article we have discussed a number of factors that are relevant to the present task but which we will not repeat here. These include discussion of terminologies employed in *borān kammaṭṭhāna* and KMBL, (see also below, ‘Terminology’). For this reason we refer the reader to that source, as well as for the summary overview of the full KMBL cycle offered there. For present purposes, the reader should understand that the *borān kammaṭṭhāna* promoted the development of calming (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassanā*), and that the calming division consists of a cycle of circa thirteen meditation subjects that in KMBL are divided into three consecutive stages: *buddha-guṇa* (lit. ‘the virtues of the Buddha’), *rūpa-jjhāna* (lit. ‘form absorption’) and *arūpa-jjhāna* (lit. ‘formless absorption’).⁶ The *pīti* section is the first meditation of the *buddha-guṇa* section, and *ānāpānasati* is the first of the *rūpa-jjhāna* section (see Table 1).

The *pīti* section of this meditation cycle requires the practitioner to perform a sequence of distinctive mental exercises in which the ‘form signs’ (*nimitta*) of the five types of *pīti* are moved around the body in specified patterns and sequences.⁷ Variants of the same exercises are also used in the next two steps of the meditation cycle, which take as their subject ‘the six pairs’ (Pali, [*cha*] *yugala*; Thai, *yukon*)⁸ and ‘bodily and mental happiness’ (Pali, *kāya-* and *citta-sukha*; Thai, *gaya-* and *jitta-suk*). For this reason, i.e. that the methodology for *yugala* and *sukha* is the same as for *pīti*, we have not discussed those two stages in any detail, but have now turned instead to the *ānāpānasati* section. This is the fourth of the thirteen stages in the cycle, the first of the *rūpajjhāna* section, and employs a significantly different meditation exercise or method to the previous three. A subsidiary reason for this choice of topic is that the primary source text used for this exploration is a translation into modern Thai of a short guide to KMBL written by Suk, and in that text Suk himself, having described the procedure for *peeti* then moves directly to mindfulness of breath, presumably for similar reasons to those we have just explained.

The translation into modern Thai of Suk’s Ayutthaya period (1350–1767) text was made by Ven. Veera Thanaveero, the present incumbent of *khana* (section)

5. Skilton and Choempolpaisal, 2015. Sources dealing with Buddhist meditation describe the primary goal of *samatha* meditation as the development of four successively higher states of absorption (Pali *jhāna*; Thai, *chan*) in which the contents of consciousness are gradually purified and simplified. In this description, *pīti* is identified as a factor or component of the first two, i.e. lowest two *jhāna*. These same sources also analyse *pīti* into five types: *khuddhakā*, ‘minor’; *khaṇṭikā*, ‘momentary’; *okkantikā*, ‘showering’; *ubbegā*, ‘uplifting’; and *pharaṇā*, ‘prevailing’. *Pīti* is primarily bodily but also a mental experience of delight, joy or pleasure.
6. These correspond with the thirteen meditation subjects of other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* meditation manuals. See Crosby 2013, 48–9.
7. The first position is located at the navel (*nābhi*) and the fifth at the heart-/mind-base, (*hadaya-vatthu*). The second, third and fourth positions are equidistant on a line between these two points. One’s *citta*, occupied with the respective *nimitta* for each of the five *pīti*s, is moved between these locations in various sequences, e.g. 12345::54321 (*kaḥ lamdub*), and 132435::534231 (*kaḥ sab*).
8. The six pairs are the following states experienced in body and mind: calmness (*passaddhi*), lightness (*lahutā*), pliancy (*mudutā*), adaptability (*kammaññatā*), competence (*paṇuṇatā*) and rectitude (*ujukatā*).

Individual lessons (Thai-Pali)	Major divisions or steps
1. <i>peeti, pīti</i>	<i>phra phuttha khun</i>
2. <i>yukhon, yugala</i>	<i>buddha-guṇa</i>
3. <i>gaya- and jitta sukha, kāya- and citta-sukha</i>	
4. <i>anapanasati, ānāpānasati</i>	<i>rup kammatthan</i>
5. <i>gayakata sati, kāyagatā sati</i>	<i>rūpa-kammaṭṭhāna</i>
6. <i>gasin, kasiṇa</i>	
7. <i>asupa, asubha</i>	
8. <i>rupachan, rūpajjhāna</i>	
9. <i>anussati, anussati</i>	<i>arupa kammatthan</i>
10. <i>phrom viharn, brahma-vihāra</i>	
11. <i>ahare patikula sanya, āhārarepaṭikūlasaṅṅā¹</i>	<i>arūpa-kammaṭṭhāna</i>
12. <i>jatu dhaturavavathan, catudhātuvavathhāna²</i>	
13. <i>arupa chan, arūpajjhāna</i>	

1. Perception of the repulsiveness of food.

2. Definition of the four elements.

Table 1. The thirteen subjects of the *samatha* meditation cycle in KMBL (left column) and the three major divisions (*hong*) across which they are distributed (right column).

five of Wat Ratchasittharam, the meditation section of that temple (Thanaveero 2007).⁹ Suk's text is so short in its description of *ānāpānasati* as to be uninformative regarding the actual practice of the meditation (see Translation 1, below),¹⁰ and so we supplement our translation of Veera's account of Suk (cited below as Thanaveero) with our translation of another exposition of the meditation practice taken from later in the same volume (Translation 2, below).¹¹ This section draws on material seemingly originating in the *Visuddhimagga* regarding the practice of mindfulness of the breath. In turn, this description is supplemented by interviews with Ven. Veera, in which further detail is given to the KMBL mindfulness of breath practice.¹²

In our previous investigation of the KMBL technique of *pīti* meditation, the material translated gave direct evidence that the contemporary technique employed for it at Wat Ratchasittharam was also known to Suk, i.e. we could

9. The text translated by Veera is titled *Kham pariyay kheun tham* 'An explanation relating to the teaching' and is dated 1783 CE. See RHC_WRSR_0003 in Choompolpaisal and Skilton, 2011.

10. The 'root' text of *borān kammatṭhāna*, the *mūla-kammaṭṭhāna*, as transmitted at Wat Ratchasittharam is similarly brief in its treatment of *ānāpānasati*. See Choompolpaisal and Skilton 2011, ms. RHC_WRSR_0001.

11. Veera has explained in interview that this too is taken from a manuscript source attributable to Suk, although we have not been able to establish the identity of this manuscript (interview, September 25th, 2014). However, as it stands it contains statements that strongly suggest that it may be a post-Suk composition. See note 29 below.)

12. Interviews specific to this practice were conducted between 25th September and 1st October 2014 by Phibul Choompolpaisal.

demonstrate a continuity of practice from the late-eighteenth century through to the twenty-first. The same demonstration cannot be made here due to the lack of detail in Suk's text. We can turn to an undated short text (also attributed to Suk) published by Veera's predecessor at Wat Ratchasittharam, which does bear witness that the contemporary technique, as taught by Veera, was in use in the twentieth century (Ronruen *et al.* n.d.).¹³ Veera himself unequivocally links the technique he teaches back to Suk's transmission.

Terminology

It should be noted that Veera's translation is of Suk's Siamese into contemporary Thai, but leaves all Pali (technical) terminology in the Pali originally used by Suk. Thus the modern Thai book publication contains a mixed Thai-Pali text. This in turn represents a challenge to our translation process, which we have met by giving the Pali on the first occasion of its occurrence and thereafter employing our English translations in order to provide a readable text. Readers are advised to remember that the Pali is used throughout in our source text, and is never translated into Siamese/Thai. When it seems desirable, we have included the Pali source phraseology in parenthesis for the sake of full clarity, giving the standard South Asian Pali and the Thai Pali for each term.

It is also desirable to discuss, albeit briefly, some of the terminology used in the text, and the translation choices that we have employed. Some of these choices, justified by linguistic usage and contemporary understanding in KMBL of what the text says, give the translation an unusual if not quaint appearance. In particular we translate all the frequently used honorifics — *phra* 'honorable'; *jao* 'majesty' — that are applied liberally to worthy persons and also, more surprisingly, to the meditation subjects, *nimittas* and *dhammas*, themselves. This gives both a better sense of how the source text reads to a native reader, but also conveys significant attitudes and ideas embedded in the language.

We should note that in KMBL there is a fundamental identity between the *kammatṭhānas* — the meditation subjects — and the form in which we experience them in meditation, i.e. the *nimittas*. This identity also extends to their status as *dhammas*, a term which is used interchangeably to designate them. More interestingly still, the phenomena variously designated by these three terms are to be understood as exalted existent entities which are invoked by the practitioner and with which they can enter into a direct, personal and interactive relationship. This explains the honorific language just mentioned, which is typical of KMBL and other *borān kammatṭhāna* litanies.

It may help clarify this usage to point out that in KMBL these three terms address the same phenomena from different aspects. *Kammatṭhāna* (or *kammatthan jao*) designates the particular meditation subject being invoked; *nimitta* emphasizes the meditation subject as experienced directly in meditation; and *dhamma* emphasizes the really existent nature of the phenomena involved.¹⁴ Thus the *kammatṭhānas* are actually experienced in the *ānāpānasati* meditation stage as *nimittas* because this is how a meditator directly experiences all medita-

13. Veera's predecessor was Paññāvuddhakun (Banjong/Sam-ang), who served as head of *khana* 5 from 1966 to 1997.

14. Veera, interview September 25th 2014.

tion objects.¹⁵ *Nimittas* are a matter of Theravāda orthodoxy, and are discussed in some detail in, for example, Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga* (e.g. ch.IV, sections 28–34, and VIII, 214–215), but KMBL understands their significance, as the directly experienced meditation subject, in a fuller and more detailed way.¹⁶ This appears to reflect a process of hypostatization, in which meditation techniques or processes have come to be regarded as objects/entities. (This is a feature of all *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, and is not restricted to KMBL.) This also leads us to the final term, *dhamma*, used in this context. This is already widely used in Theravāda with a wide range of meanings, including most pertinently here the Abhidhamma sense of 'ultimate constituent' as identified under meditative analysis. While KMBL clearly wants to retain a strong link with canonical sources and authority, it also appears to use Abhidhamma terminology in non-classical ways, including here where it applies the term *dhamma* to referents that are certainly not *dhammas* in classical Abhidhamma. We should note that while Suk was a monk at Wat Pradusongtham in Ayutthaya, he studied Abhidhamma there, alongside meditation and Kaccāyana's grammar, and we should assume some understanding of the subject on his part (see Choompolpaisal forthcoming). When pressed on this particular issue, i.e. reconciling KMBL use of Abhidhamma terms, Veera invoked the primacy of experience over theory, i.e. that in the context of meditation practice, detailed technical meanings are not as important as what is directly experienced by the practitioner, and declined to comment further.¹⁷

While the role of Abhidhamma terminology in KMBL warrants further research, the authors are obliged to take at face value Veera's explanation that *dhamma* in this context is used to denote a really existent entity experienced in meditation. Whether this should be seen as an extension of the semantic range of the term *dhamma*, an adaptive development of its application, or as loose usage, remains to be determined by further exploration of the literature of Suk's tradition as well as of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* as a whole.¹⁸ As a result of this experiential perspective we have adopted the perhaps unexpected translation of 'essential entity' for *dhamma*, because the *dhammas*, i.e. the *kammaṭṭhānas* experienced directly in the form of the *nimittas*, are all experienced by a successful practitioner as really existent 'presences' that appear to them and with which interaction is possible. It is not surprising therefore that the *kammaṭṭhānas* are also refuges, alongside the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and are all addressed as living existent entities, employing the honorific language reserved normally for the Buddha and for royalty.

Finally, there is frequent reference to *nimittas*, 'signs', in the text, i.e. the terms *uggaha nimitta* and *paṭibhāga nimitta*.¹⁹ Accepted translations are already in use – 'learning sign' for *uggaha nimitta* and 'counterpart sign' for *paṭibhāga nimitta*

15. This also applies in the other meditation stages of *borān kammaṭṭhāna*.

16. The authors are aware of a number of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* treatises devoted solely to detailing differences between *nimittas* experienced at the different stages of employing different meditation techniques.

17. This position was consistently asserted by Veera in various interviews between 2012 and 2014.

18. The present authors have already touched on this problem in relation to an aspect of the litany for the *pīti* meditation in KMBL elsewhere. See Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2015.

19. There is no reference made to the *parikamma nimitta*, the 'preliminary sign' in this text.

— but neither are helpful for understanding how these phenomena are understood in KMBL. We understand from Veera that these terms are never translated into Thai in KMBL and there is no Thai equivalent for them in KMBL.²⁰ In KMBL a *nimitta* is an eidetic image, seen with the practitioner’s internal/mental eye-faculty, and when developed typically has the form of a coloured sphere of light or crystal.²¹ The *uggaha nimitta* is restricted in size and brightness and does not change throughout each meditation session. The *paṭibhāga nimitta* however is qualitatively different, being both brighter and clearer but also capable of change during the course of the meditation. Reflecting the quality, i.e. purity and concentration, of the practitioner’s mind, the *paṭibhāga nimitta* can change colour, become intensely brighter and expand in size during the meditation session, as the mind is purified. One can only gain access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) with the *uggaha nimitta*, whereas full absorption (*jhāna*) or absorption concentration (*appanā samādhi*) occurs with the *paṭibhāga nimitta* (Thanaveero 2013, 38). We have left these terms untranslated.

Translation 1

I will meditate on (*bhāvanā*) its majesty the essential entity that is mindfulness of breath (*anāpanasati dhamma jao*) as a means to invoke the *uggaha nimitta* and the *paṭibhāga nimitta* in the lesson (*hong*, lit. ‘room’) on its majesty the mindfulness of breath (*anāpanasati jao*). May his honorable majesty the Buddha (*phra buddha jao*) be my refuge. May all their many honorable majesties, the meditation subjects (*phra kammatthan jao*), be my refuge.

Permit me (*ukāsa*)! Here and now, I will perform the practice as a means to pay respect to the teachings of his honorable majesty the Omniscient Gotama Buddha (*phra sappanyo Gotamo Buddha jao*). I will invoke to appear for me the *uggaha nimitta* and *paṭibhāga nimitta* in the lesson of the honorable essential entity that is mindfulness of breath through my uttering, *itipiso bhagavā ...*,²² [and then] *sammā araham x3*²³ [and] *araham x3* Permit me! Here and now, I will do the practice as a means to pay respect to the teachings of his honorable majesty the Omniscient Buddha. This is in order to invoke the *uggaha nimitta* in the lesson of its majesty the mindfulness of breath to appear in my [mental] eye (*cakkhu-dvāra*), in my mind (*mano-dvāra*) and in my body (*kāya-dvāra*) during the time when I sit in meditation (*bhāvanā*). If I cannot get to attain its honorable majesty the *uggaha nimitta*, even if my skin shrivels ... [my blood dries up, my nerves shrink, my back collapses, my bones crumble,²⁴] but my life can still con-

20. Interview, September 25th, 2014.

21. The experience of contemporary practitioners as reported in interview suggests that in early stages of practice, where the *nimittas* are not developed or strong, they may be experienced in a wide range of appearances which might require a skilled teacher for identification (interviews, August (Bangkok) and October (London) 2015).

22. The full *buddha-vandanā* is intended here.

23. This and the following term are repeated three times each as mantras. Elsewhere in this text this is describe as ‘preparatory practice’, *parikamma*.

24. We have supplemented the elipsis in the source text with the full expression as translated from the *pīti* section. A variant of this same litany is used for *pīti*. See Skilton and Choompalpaisal 2015.

tinue, I will make a further attempt gradually to invoke the *uggaha nimitta* in the lesson of its majesty the mindfulness of breath. During the time when I sit in meditation (*bhāvanā*) with my vow (Thai, *sat*) I will gradually recite (*parikamma*) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, one hundred times, one thousand times, then I will invoke the *uggaha nimitta* in the lesson of its majesty the mindfulness of breath. May the three jewels (*jao ku*) come to my awareness/perception (*saññā*). May this be a cause of Nibbana (*nibbāna paccayo hotu*).²⁵ (Translated from Thanaveero 2007, 25.25–26.11)

Translation 2

Lesson on the mindfulness of breath meditation subject (*hong anapanasati kammathan*)

The Buddha says, ‘Rahula, hear me! You should cultivate mindfulness of breath (*anapanasati*) because the mindfulness of breath that a person has already cultivated and practised much will bring about many consequences as well as many advantages (*anisong*)’.²⁶ Also as follows:

The Blessed One says, ‘Monks, hear me! The mindfulness of breath meditation subject in which a person has trained well, and has cultivated and in which they are proficient, will help that person achieve the perfect conditions for the four foundations of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*). Anyone who has cultivated the four foundations of mindfulness to the perfect level will be able to cultivate the seven Limbs of Awakening (*satta bojjhaṅga*). The perfect conditions of the seven Limbs of Awakening will enable one to gain knowledge (*vijjā*) and liberation (*vimutti*). They are the proximate cause (*padatṭhāna*) for the paths (*magga*), fruits (*phala*) and Nibbana (*nibbāna*).’ This is the way to purity like pure white cloth (*Ānāpānasati-sutta* MN 118).

The Blessed One praises mindfulness of breath as the *ariya-vihāra* — an essential entity that is experienced by their majesties the Noble Ones (*ariya jao*); as *brahma-vihāra* — an essential entity that is experienced by *brahmās*; and as *Tathāgata vihāra* — an essential entity that is experienced by the Buddhas.²⁷ Mindfulness of breath concerns the path of the breath and contact points.

The honorable meditation practitioner (*phra yogāvacara*) cultivates the ‘honorable progressive training (of the mind) in the middle way employing meditation subjects’ (*phra kammathan majjima baeb lamdub*) until achieving access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) and then he will move up to the next more refined level of mental concentration (*citta samādhi*) to the level of absorption concentration (*appanā samādhi*). He will then change

25. This wish is used widely in *borān kammaṭṭhāna* sources.

26. In this passage the text paraphrases three *suttas*: firstly here, *Mahārāhulovāda-sutta* MN 62.

27. *Ichhānaṅgala-sutta* SN.54.2.11 (at SV V 325–326). The *sutta* reads: *ānāpānasatisamādhiṃ sammā vadamāno vadeyya: ‘ariyavihāro’ itipi, ‘brahmavihāro’ itipi, ‘tathāgatavihāro’ itipi*. The KMBL passage shows, by adding a gloss concerning *dhamma*, how *borān kammaṭṭhāna* teachers understand the Buddha’s statement. Here the *dhamma* that is the experienced entity that is *ānāpānasati(samādhi)*, is understood as an experience shared by these three classes of being. Nevertheless, according to our informant the characteristics of that essential entity will differ according to the more or less developed minds of the three categories mentioned.

to invoke the honorable meditation subject (*phra kammattṭhan*) which has a *paṭibhāga nimitta*.²⁸ Regarding absorption concentration, the traditional teachers (Thai, *borannajan*; Pali, *porāṇa-ācariya*), for example Somdet Sangharat Suk Kaitheun, have taught that practitioners should cultivate the mindfulness of breath meditation subject, which is the great honorable meditation subject (*phra kammattṭhan*).²⁹ At the beginning practitioners start by cultivating calming meditation subjects (*samatha kammattṭhan*) in order to refine the mind (*citta*). This is the foundation of insight (*vipassanā*) in the next level.

Whenever practitioners will cultivate calming (*samatha*) in the lesson of the mindfulness of breath meditation subject (*anapanasati kammattṭhan*), the teachers give the following instructions as summarized below:

1. *gaṇanā* (Pali; Thai, *kanana*) which means counting. Because the mindfulness of breath meditation subject is the honorable meditation subject relating to breathing, it starts with breathing out and breathing in. When breathing out, count 1 2 3 4 5.³⁰ This is *anuloma* (Pali; Thai, *anulom*), in forward direction. When breathing in, count 5 4 3 2 1. This is *paṭiloma* (Pali; Thai, *paṭilom*), in reverse direction.

2. *anubandhanā* (Pali; Thai, *anupantana*) which means ‘to follow the breath’. After counting through the breath, focus by following continuously the movement of the air when breathing in and out.

3. *phussanā* (Pali; Thai *phutsana*) which means ‘contact’. After counting through the breath and having already focused on following the movement of the air, then focus on the contact between the breath moving in and out and the location of points of contact; for example, at the bridge of the nose, and at the tip of the nose. This is called contact.

4. *ṭhapanā* (Pali; Thai *tapana*) which means ‘standing firm’.³¹ After counting through the breathing and having already focused on following the movement of the air, and after focusing on the contact points, then once knowing their locations, then focus on each location until the awareness (Pali *citta*, Thai *jitta*) stands firm there, making sure that the form signs (*nimitta*) are standing firm. For example when the air makes contact with the tip of the nose, then one must focus the *citta* to make it stand firm at that location.

Gaṇanā, counting, helps stop doubt (Pali, *vicikicchā*; Thai, *vijikitcha*). *Anubandhanā*, following the breath, helps stop coarse directive thought (Pali, *vitakka*; Thai, *vitok*) and helps maintain the continuity of mindfulness of the breath. *Phussanā*, contact, helps stop the mind from wandering away and helps make perception (Pali, *saññā*; Thai, *sanya*) become firm. *Ṭhapanā*, standing firm, helps consciousness, *citta*, stand firm, becoming concentration (Pali, *samādhi*; Thai, *samathi*).

-
28. This is the first stage of the meditation cycle at which absorption, *appanā samādhi*, is possible. The first three lessons only invoke the *uggaha nimitta* and thus only allow the development of access concentration, *upacāra samādhi*.
29. The reference to Suk and the name KMBL both imply that this passage of the text (if not text 2 as whole) is a post-Suk composition.
30. The counting is not being used to time the breath, but just as a support to develop concentration.
31. Nāṇamoli (2010), ‘fixing’; Dhammajoti (2009), ‘stilling’.

To cultivate mindfulness of the breath at the level of calming (*samatha*),³² one has to cultivate the counting of the breath, the following of the breath, the contacts with the breath, and standing firm. These can be done all on the same occasion, with variations on single occasions (*kāla*), or the full cycle repeated each time.³³ The cultivation of mindfulness of the breath at the calming level can then be accomplished right up to *appanā samādhi* (attainment of absorption, i.e. *jhāna*)

However, because there are countless numbers of points of contact on breathing in and breathing out, many honorable meditation practitioners (*phra yogāvacara*) were quite ambiguous in their explanations of different *nimittas* (i.e. breathing contact points). Many honorable meditation practitioners then actually got confused. They then failed to cultivate mindfulness of the breath at the calming (*samatha*) level. So to avoid confusion, traditional teachers (*boran-ajan*) in the past then limited the number of contact points for breathing in and out to nine locations. This is to improve the clarity of many *nimittas* and to avoid confusion. [The nine locations are] as follows:

1. *the middle of the navel*³⁴
2. *the top lip*
3. *the nasal septum*
4. *the tip of the nose*
5. *between the eyes*
6. *between the eyebrows*
7. *the crown of the head*
8. *root of the tongue*³⁵
9. *at the hadaya-vatthu (heart-/mind-base)*

Verses for the propitiation of the signs of concentration
(*aradhana samadhi nimitta*) in the *anapanasati* lesson (*hong*)

I wish to cultivate (*bhāvānā*) its majesty the meditation subject the mindfulness of the breath (*anapanasati kammatthan jao*) as a means to acquire the *uggaha-nimitta* (*paṭibhaga-nimitta*)³⁶ in the lesson of its majesty the mindfulness of the breath (*anapanasati jao*). May his honorable majesty the Buddha (*phra Buddha jao*) be my refuge, may all their honorable majesties

32. KMBL and other *borān kammatṭhāna* traditions allow for the cultivation of *ānāpānasati* at the level of *vipassanā* also.

33. The contrast intended here is between selective practice of these stages in a meditation session or rehearsing the full cycle for each meditation session.

34. Although mentioned first here, the navel is understood to be the last in the sequence, i.e. in this respect, the sequence here is not the sequence to be used in the meditation practice (Veera, interview October 1st, 2014).

35. This location is described as ‘the roof of the mouth’ in Ronruen et al. p.26.

36. Both *nimitta* are mentioned here, but Veera’s advice is that one should first recite the litany and practise the meditation in order to acquire the *uggaha nimitta*, and then do both a second time in order to acquire the *paṭibhāga nimitta*. The brackets here therefore imply a repetition of the entire exercise and that the *ānāpānasati* meditation as a whole has two stages or cycles concerned with acquiring the two sets of *nimitta*.

the [meditation subject³⁷] entities (*phra [kammathan] dhamma jao*) be my refuge, may their honorable majesties the community of the noble ones (*phra ariya sangha jao*) from the beginning starting with his honorable majesty, the Great Mahākoṇḍañña the Elder (*phra maha anyakondanya therā jao*) right up until the ordinary present day community (*sammuti sangha*) be my refuge. May the first community of nobles who taught all their honorable majesties the meditation subjects (*phra kammathan jao*) be my refuge. May all their honorable majesties the meditation subjects be my refuge.

Permit me! (*ukāsa!*) Permit me! Here [and now]³⁸ I wish to practise [meditation] as a means to pay respect following the teaching of his honorable majesty the Omniscient Gotama (*phra sabbaññu Gotama jao*). This is to acquire the *uggaha-nimitta* (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*) in the lesson of its majesty the mindfulness of the breath (*anapanasati jao*). May my lord appear in my mental eye, in my mind and in my body (*cakkhu-dvāra mano-dvāra kāya-dvāra*) during the time when I sit in meditation.

[recite]³⁹ *itipi so bhagavā araham sammā sambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidu anuttaro purisadammasārathī satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā ti.*

[recite] *sammā araham* 3 times

[recite] *araham* 3 times

(Breathing out, meditate counting 1 2 3 4 5; breathing in, meditate counting 5 4 3 2 1.)⁴⁰ (Translated from Thanaveero 2007, 60.16–62.22)

The procedure for the mindfulness of breath meditation

The translations above offer a range of information important for the practice of the mindfulness of the breath in KMBL, but neither quite give a straightforward consecutive account of how the practice is implemented.

In Translation 1 Suk provides the litany for the practice, i.e. the text to be recited by the practitioner by way of propitiation (*ārādhana*) and resolution (*adhiṭṭhāna*) as preparation for undertaking the meditation exercise. This consists of an initial statement of intention, namely that the practice is to be undertaken in order to invoke the *nimittas* accessible through this practice. These are both the *uggaha* and *paṭibhāga* ‘form signs’. As in the *pīti* section, the *nimittas* are to be experienced by the practitioner as substantial entities consisting of forms and coloured light.⁴¹ They are specific to each stage of the practice and when the practitioner experiences them they are expected to report the details to their teacher. The teacher is in part qualified to teach by knowing the detailed distinctions of the *nimitta* experienced at each stage.⁴² Experience of the correct *nimitta* is a sign to the teacher that the pupil can move on to the next stage of the practice in hand.

37. Term in brackets added by authors for clarification.

38. Words in brackets supplied by present translators in conformity with precedents in the text.

39. Material in square brackets supplied by present authors.

40. This final passage in parenthesis constitutes a direction to begin the meditation exercise proper as previously instructed, i.e. this litany should precede the meditation exercise described for this meditation subject.

41. Only *uggaha nimittas* are experienced in the *pīti* meditation.

42. There are specialized *borān kammatṭhāna* texts that describe the *nimittas* for all the meditation subjects in the cycle.



Figure 1. The five *borān* offerings photographed at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi, August 2011 (Photo A. Skilton).

The litany also includes the going for refuge to what we can describe as the *borān* or ‘ancient’ refuges, i.e. Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, meditation teachers and the meditation subjects (*kammaṭṭhāna*) themselves. These are represented in the standard set of offerings used in KMBL (See Figure 1).

The next two sections, going for refuge and resolve, are both preceded by the standard *borān kammaṭṭhāna* request for permission, ‘*ukasa!* (Pali, *okāsa*)’. The refuges are followed by an undertaking to perform the ‘preparation’ (*parikamma*), i.e. the recitation of the *Buddha-vandanā* and two mantras, *sammā arahaṃ* and *arahaṃ*. The final section is a resolve to practise until the end of life, obviously reminiscent of the *bodhisatta*’s resolution beneath the Bodhi tree.

The litany just summarized is familiar in general framing from the *pīti* section and is repeated with minor variants for each lesson (*hong*) in the KMBL cycle.⁴³ We should probably understand the litany as a part ritual and part mnemonic device that facilitates the meditation by organising and recording the sequence of the stages of the cycle. The absence however of any detail of the *ānāpānasati* practice per se is implicitly acknowledged by Veera’s supplementary section, our Translation 2, in which practical details are provided.

Before giving these practical details however, this sections starts with paraphrases extolling the virtue and significance of *ānāpānasati* from three *suttas* which the text does not name. These are: *Mahārāhulovāda-sutta*, *Ānāpānasati-sutta*, and *Īcchānaṅgala-sutta*. This is followed by a paragraph explaining that the general goal of KMBL meditation is first to attain access concentration and then move

43. It is also recognizable from a variety of other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* texts investigated in Bizot 1992, Crosby 1999 and de Bernon 2000.

to absorption concentration by practising *ānāpānasati*, as a basis for ultimately cultivating insight (*vipassanā*). After this general introduction, the text moves on to details of practice.

These begin with a passage seemingly dependent ultimately on the *Visuddhimagga*'s exposition of *ānāpānasati*.⁴⁴ Specifically we are referring to Buddhaghosa's account of the stages of 'giving attention' (*manasikāra*) to the meditation subject, i.e. to *ānāpāna*, the in and out breath. These stages are eight in number (although Veera's account only uses the first four):

Here are the stages in giving attention to it: (1) counting, (2) connection, (3) touching, (4) fixing, (5) observing, (6) turning away, (7) purification, and (8) looking back on these.

Herein, *counting* is just counting, *connection* is carrying on, *touching* is the place touched [by the breaths], *fixing* is absorption, *observing* is insight, *turning away* is the path, *purification* is fruition, *looking back on these* is reviewing.

(Ñāṇamoli 2010, 272; Vism. 278ff.)⁴⁵

This number and sequence of stages appears to be unique to Buddhaghosa and thereafter to Theravāda tradition, and K. L. Dhammajoti demonstrates that it diverges from the patterns of stages in all other texts, wherein the first four stages are always: counting, following, stilling and observing. This leads Dhammajoti to suggest that 'this eight-stage enumeration seems to be Buddhaghosa's innovation'.⁴⁶

The apparent abbreviation of the *Visuddhimagga* scheme in Veera's text can probably be accounted for by Buddhaghosa's assertion that the absorptions *jhāna* are successfully cultivated by use of the first four of these stages, and that the last four are to be used to cultivate insight (*vipassanā*).

As he strives thus, fourfold and fivefold *jhāna* is achieved by him on that same sign in the same way as described under the earth *kaṣiṇa*.

However, when a bhikkhu has achieved the fourfold and fivefold *jhāna* and wants to reach purity by developing the meditation subject through *observing* and through *turning away*, he should make that *jhāna* familiar by attaining mastery in it in the five ways, and then embark upon insight by defining mentality-materiality.

(Ñāṇamoli 2010, 279; Vism. 286)

Buddhaghosa thus limits the function of the first four of these stages to the development of calming, *samatha*, the explicit goal of this level of practice in KMBL.

44. It is unclear at present whether or not this connection to or use of material in the *Visuddhimagga* has been made in the modern period. For a brief discussion of this trend of retrospective authorization, see Crosby 2013, 146.

45. Here and hereafter, Vism references are to the Pali text of the PTS edition of the *Visuddhimagga*, edited by Rhys Davids 1975.

46. Dhammajoti 2009, 640. Dhammajoti contrasts Buddhaghosa's eight-stage account with others employing, variously, four or six stages. Dhammajoti contrasts Buddhaghosa's opening four actions: *gaṇanā*, *anubandhanā*, *phusanā* and *thapanā*, to the opening four of all the other sources he consults: *gaṇanā*, *anugama*, *sthāpanā* and *upalakṣanā*. These sources include *Abhidharmakośa*, *Jietuodaolun* (= **Vimuttimaggā/Vimuktimarga*), *Yogācārabhūmi*, two Chinese āgama translations of the *Mahāsatipatṭhāna-sutta*, *Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra*, *Nyāyānusāra* and *Śrāvakabhūmi*.

Buddhaghosa gives a fairly detailed description of stages one and two and a less detailed, but more extensive, one for stages three and four. Stage one, counting, consists of counting breaths in cycles of between five and ten. One starts by counting ‘one’ on the in-breath and ‘one’ again on the out-breath; then ‘two’ on the next in-breath and ‘two’ on its out-breath. This should go on up to at least ‘five’ and at the most ‘ten’.⁴⁷ When the top number is reached, the practitioner reverts to ‘one’. As the practitioner becomes more experienced and familiar with watching their breath, they can move from counting retrospectively, after the movement of breath, to counting in anticipation of the movement of breath. The mind becomes absorbed in the experience of breathing and counting. Once the practitioner’s attention becomes settled on the action of breathing without the need for counting, they can then move on to the next stage, ‘following the breath’.

The KMBL version of the counting stage is different, in that the practitioner begins with an out-breath and counts from one to five during the exhalation. They then count ‘down’ from five to one during the following in-breath. These alternations of numerical sequence are designated *anuloma* and *paṭiloma*, forward and reverse, respectively, and their usage here re-establishes a pattern of performing ‘forward and reverse’ actions or sequences already familiar from the previous meditations in the cycle (see Skilton and Choompolpaisal 2015.)

Buddhaghosa’s stage two consists of applying one’s attention to ‘following’ the breath as it moves in and out of the body. Buddhaghosa strictly limits the in- and out-breaths under consideration here to the passage of air between the tip of the nose and the navel, via the heart. Following the breath beyond either of these two end points destabilizes the mindfulness being developed (Ñānamoli 2010, 273; Vism. 280). Veera’s instruction on this stage is less detailed and no explicit restriction is mentioned.

Buddhaghosa’s account of stages three and four, ‘touching’ and ‘fixing’ in Ñānamoli’s translation (‘contact’ and ‘standing firm’ in Veera’s), is run together and actually considerably longer than the description of stages one and two — over five pages compared to under two. He begins by explaining that these two functions are always performed simultaneously, that there is not one without the other. Moreover, one can in fact combine the actions of touching and fixing with either counting or following the breath, suggesting that Buddhaghosa understood these stages as perspectival rather than substantial in their difference (Ñānamoli 2010, 273–274; Vism. 280.) He then goes on to illustrate their practice through a series of three similes which confirm this impression. The longest of these similes, commonly known as ‘the saw’ but actually describing a log cutter at work, is quoted by Buddhaghosa from the *ānāpānasati* section of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (Ñānamoli 1997, 171–172). The ‘man who cannot walk’, the ‘gatekeeper’ and ‘the saw’ or ‘log cutter’ each illustrate ways in which attention is given to a specific point or location even as the object of attention passes through that point in one or another direction. In each case the person focuses on their object just at one still point that does not itself move with the passing action. Thus the disabled father pushing a swing (holding his children and his wife), focuses on the board of the swing as it passes him by. The gatekeeper focuses on the folk moving back

47. Buddhaghosa suggests that counting less than five leaves one’s thoughts cramped ‘like a herd of cattle in a small pen’, but that going over ten results in your mind taking as its object the numbers rather than the breath.

and forth through the gate, but only while they are at the gate, and not as they approach or depart. The man sawing the log focuses on the teeth of the saw just as they slice into the wood, and not before or after they have made contact with the wood. In no case do the observers follow the object once it has passed by the crucial point of contact (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 274–275; Vism. 281–282). The immediate thrust of his similes is to demonstrate that consciousness of inbreath, of outbreath and of the *nimitta* are separate moments of consciousness (*citta*), but the meditation subject works and concentration is achieved by focusing on one while retaining some liminal awareness of the others. Buddhaghosa's concern appears to be to explain how one-pointedness of consciousness is possible when the technique appears to be asking the meditator to focus on three distinct objects.

Unfortunately these are relatively artificial and prescriptive descriptions in themselves and we all know from experience that doting parents, guards of all shapes and sizes, and aspiring carpenters all on frequent occasion follow their objects back and forth, i.e. exactly what Buddhaghosa suggests they do not do. These similes appear helpful, but are not decisively so in describing the action required, and are really offered by Buddhaghosa to illustrate a philosophical point about discrete moments of consciousness.

When the practitioner ultimately ceases counting, and 'is connecting them [the breaths] by means of mindfulness in that same place and fixing consciousness by means of absorption, then he is said to be giving his attention to them by connection, touching and fixing.' (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 274).⁴⁸ 'Fixing' or 'standing firm' is achieved when 'absorption adorned with the rest of the *jhāna* factors' arises (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 275; Vism. 282).

Buddhaghosa's account seems a little under-developed, in that he gives no clear definition or description of the functions or locations of contact (*phussanā*) and standing firm (*thapanā*), and the similes he employs here do not perfectly illuminate them. Moreover, in the same passage he digresses into several interesting side issues in his discussion of these two stages. These include three interesting points to which we shall return: 1. the progressive refinement of the breath as meditation subject up to the point of vanishing.⁴⁹ The other *kammaṭṭhānas* become clearer and more distinct as the meditation is more successful, and do not vanish. The potential distraction of this is that one might think it is all over when the meditation subject disappears! 2. The variety of *nimittas* that could be experienced for this subject, and 3. the difference between *Majjhima-* and *Dīgha-bhāṇakas* in acknowledging success with this subject (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 276–278; Vism. 282–286).

Veera's account, by contrast, is succinct and concrete. In the 'contact' stage one should give attention to the breath where it makes contact with specific, named points on or in the practitioner's body. To facilitate this, a sequence of nine specific locations are designated, reaching from the top lip through to the navel and thus all located on the restricted path of the breath defined by Buddhaghosa.⁵⁰ The practitioner should focus on experiencing the breath mak-

48. Words in brackets supplied by present authors; Vism. 280.

49. '... it even comes to the point at which it is no longer manifest' (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 276) — *upaṭṭhānam pi na gacchati*, Vism. 283.

50. The top lip might be seen as an exception to this claim, but in fact Buddhaghosa himself discusses whether the top lip or the tip of the nose is the starting point for the in-breath, the experience being determined by length of nose (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 276; Vism. 283–284).

ing contact with the body at each of these in sequence. If the practitioner is still using counting as an aid, then the forward and reverse sequences mentioned above should be employed at each location. This stage therefore consists of relocating one's attention between specific points on a pathway through the body along which the in- and out-breaths travel (see Figure 2, a and b). The sequence used in practising the contact and fixing stages is as follows:

1. the top lip
2. the nasal septum
3. the tip of the nose
4. between the eyes
5. between the eyebrows
6. the crown of the head
7. root of the tongue
8. at the *hadaya-vatthu* (heart-/mind-base)
9. the middle of the navel.

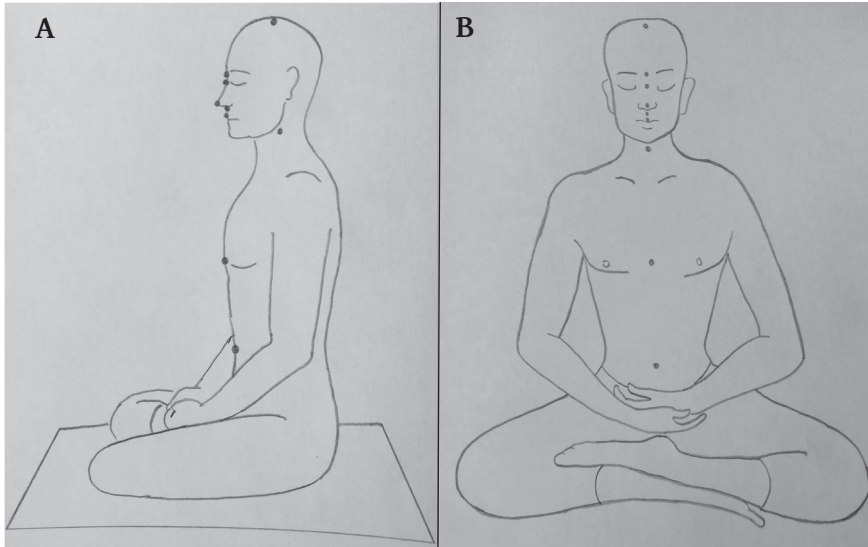
Only this sequence is to be used and there is no forward and reverse (*anuloma paṭiloma*) action through this list. Veera states that these nine locations were selected by Suk as the best locations for developing the *nimittas* for the *ānāpānasati* meditation (Thanaveero 2013, 100).⁵¹

One should relocate one's *citta* to these points and concentrate on 'fixing' it there so that the *nimittas* arise at that point. This relocation of one's *citta* to specific locations within the body is to be understood literally (and as such is the first exercise which one is given when introduced to KMBL).⁵² Since this is a literal relocation, the objects of mind are understood to occur in those locations. There are specific *nimittas* for each location and there is also a difference between the learning and counterpart *nimittas* (*uggaha* and *paṭibhāga nimitta*) for each. As in Buddhaghosa, 'fixing' in Veera's account is about the arising of the *nimitta*, but for Veera these are the respective unique *nimittas* for each of the nine locations, whereas in the *Visuddhimagga* there is no implication that the *nimitta* changes during this movement. For Veera, fixing is a matter of fixing the mind firmly at each location, experiencing the breath there and also fixing the *nimitta* at that location once it has arisen. Through this process, as in Buddhaghosa, the absorptions (*jhāna*) can be developed, i.e. *appanā samādhi* attained. This part of the meditation is the core of the practice as it is here that, by focusing one's *citta* at the nine locations, one develops the *nimittas* for this meditation subject.

The guidance in the KMBL texts is formulaic, and practitioners are encouraged to follow the full sequence. Veera explains verbally that in different circumstances one may not need to do all the stages. On the other hand, one may be

51. Reflecting the issue of diversity within *borān kammaṭṭhāna* mentioned at the start of this article, it can be noted that the *dharmakaya* method uses only three locations — the tip of the nose, the throat and the navel. The *nimitta* is stationary and developed at the navel centre. The inbreath is followed through the body to reach the *nimitta* at that point (Chayamangkalo 1999, 150).

52. Personal experience of the author (Skilton). The first exercise assigned to a beginner is to move one's *citta* to one's navel (*nābhi*).



Figures 2. The location of the nine points at which to concentrate one's *citta* in *ānāpānasati* meditation. Although the points of contact are in some cases internal, the *nimittas* associated with them are experienced neither inside the body nor on the skin surface, but in the deep or bottom layer of the inner skin. *Nimittas* will appear once one's *citta* stands firm at each of the nine locations. The nine locations here only partially correspond to a set of nine locations used in *borān kammatṭhan* healing practices (see Mettanando 1999, 95–98).

advised by one's teacher to do them all (from *gaṇanā* to *ṭhapanā*) in each meditation session. Variations depend on each practitioner, his/her ability to achieve concentration, their quality of mind, etc. The stages should be understood to be incremental and their goal is the steady 'fixing' of the *nimittas* at the nine locations. This is the criterion which governs variables such as the timing of the meditation and whether one repeats the cycle or individual stages: as soon as one has developed clear and strong *nimittas* in all the correct locations, one has achieved success in this stage of the *samatha* meditation cycle. If this happens on the first occasion of practice one does not need to repeat the cycle. Similarly, one practises for as long as it takes to develop high quality *nimittas*. The judge of success is the teacher, to whom the practitioner reports their experience.⁵³

Finally in this passage Veera gives another section of litany which shares all its elements with those of the litany in Translation 1. Although it is located after his account of the details of the practice, it is clear that this should precede it. It should be recited twice, once before practising *ānāpānasati* for the *uggaha nimitta* and once before practising for the *paṭibhāga nimitta*.

Discussion

We can immediately note some similarities between the *pīti* and *ānāpānasati* practices in the KMBL system. Both meditations give high importance to physical

53. Veera, interview October 1st, 2014.

locations in or on the body for focusing on *nimittas*. These *nimittas* are attained by locating one's *citta* at the designated points according to the procedure outlined. Both meditation practices as outlined by Suk and Veera also clearly demonstrate, through the language used, an understanding that *nimitta*, *dhamma* and *kammaṭṭhāna jao* are experienced as entities. At the same time we can also note dissimilarities: for example, despite the shared emphasis on *nimitta* etc. as experienced entities, practitioners do not experience the same entities in the *ānāpānasati* stage as in *pīti* stage; i.e. the *nimittas* are understood to be uniquely different. It is also worth pointing out that while parts of the KMBL account of *ānāpānasati* bears a clear relationship with the *Visuddhimagga*, its account of *pīti* does not — *pīti* is not even a *kammaṭṭhāna* in Buddhaghosa's text.

A further parallel with the *Visuddhimagga* is Veera's account of the development of the nine locations involved in the contact stage. As already remarked, Buddhaghosa's account diverges into a discussion of the diversity of *nimittas* that may be experienced with *ānāpānasati* even at one contact point:

the sign soon appears to him. But it is not the same for all; on the contrary, some say that when it appears it does so to certain people producing a light touch like cotton or silk-cotton or a draught.

But this is the exposition given in the commentaries: It appears to some like a star or a cluster of gems or a cluster of pearls, to others with a rough touch like that of silk-cotton seeds or a peg made of heartwood, to others like a long braid string or a wreath of flowers or a puff of smoke, to others like a stretched-out cobweb or a film of cloud or a lotus flower or a chariot wheel or the moon's disk or the sun's disk. (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 277–278; Vism. 285)

This diversity, Buddhaghosa suggests, can be explained by the analogy of monks reciting a *sutta*. When asked 'What was it like for you?', each answers according to his personal, subjective experience. Likewise, the experience of *nimittas* is entirely a matter of subjective perception (*saññā*) according to Buddhaghosa — and is thus liable to personal variation. The commentary to the *Visuddhimagga* adds: "Because of difference in perception": because of the difference in the manner of perceiving that occurred before the arising of the sign' (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 278 n.60).

This discussion prompts Buddhaghosa to make two observations, one philosophical and the other sociological. The first, already discussed above, is that consciousness (*citta*) of the in-breath, is not (cannot be) the same as consciousness of the out-breath, nor consciousness of the *nimitta*. These are three separate moments of consciousness, each with a different object. While he cites the *Patisambhidāmagga* to the effect that one only achieves meditational development (*bhāvanā upalabbhati*) if one understands that the three cannot be the object of a one-pointed moment of consciousness (*anārammaṇam ekacittassa*), he goes on to say that one only gets any further with one's meditation by fixing the mind exclusively on the *nimitta*, quoting 'the folk of old' (*porāṇehi*) by way of support (Ñāṇamoli 2010, 278; Vism. 286).⁵⁴ This is the closest Buddhaghosa seems to get to defining *fixing*.⁵⁵ This aligns well with the explanation offered in KMBL.

54. The verse attributed to them is unidentified, but through its emphasis on the role of the *nimitta* in meditation, a theme which is clearly developed in *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, raises a question about the possible antiquity of its approach to meditation.

55. *athānena nimittēveva cittaṃ ṭhapetabbaṃ. evamassāyaṃ ito pabhuti ṭhapanāvasena bhāvanā hoti.*

The sociological point is the observation that *Dīgha-* and *Majjhima-bhāṇakas* respond differently when the *ānāpānasati* practitioner reports experiencing different *nimittas*. *Dīghabhāṇakas* apparently behave in a neutral fashion, saying something like, ‘This is what happens, my friend, just carry on paying attention.’ Their tradition apparently wants to avoid either complacency (if the practitioner is told that the sign is ‘correct’) or discouragement (if they are told it is ‘wrong’). By contrast, when a practitioner reports experiencing a *nimitta* to *Majjhimbhāṇakas*, the latter are very enthusiastic and applaud the practitioner’s success, and then encourage them to ‘Carry on!’ While providing interesting detail about variations in meditation instruction in Buddhaghosa’s day (or ‘the day’ of his commentarial sources), the point of these two digressions is to add depth to his discussion of the potential for confusion regarding variations that are reported in the *nimittas* experienced for *ānāpānasati*.

The theme of diversity of reported *nimittas* is taken up in Veera’s account, where however that diversity is put down to the number of potential points of contact — the assumption apparently being that every different location would generate different qualities of *nimittas*. This diversity allegedly caused confusion amongst meditators in the past and some clarification was clearly desirable. The designation of the nine locations is thus offered as a standardized strategy to limit potential confusion. Despite offering such a standard strategy, KMBL does not totally reject the possibility of focusing on *nimittas* at any other alternative locations. For KMBL, although focusing the *citta* on alternative locations would give rise to variant experiences of *nimittas*, such experiences would not allow one to acquire the best qualities of *nimittas* i.e. qualities that can be judged by clarity, brightness, etc. Veera maintains that the nine designated locations are not selected arbitrarily, but are themselves significant ‘energy centres’ in the body and constitute a ‘spiritual/soteriological path’. It is this last quality that allows one to experience *nimittas* better here at these points than at other locations, where *nimittas* cannot be seen so well. From the soteriological point of view this therefore prioritizes the use of the nine locations — they best facilitate progress on the path, and thus the *nibbāna*-oriented practitioner uses them by preference for this reason. In addition, consciousness (*citta*) itself is also more ‘powerful’ at these points in response to the energy centres.⁵⁶

Veera advises that the texts give a kind of ‘baseline’ guide to what should be done in the meditation, but that in practice individual experience and ability can result in variation from that baseline (see Skilton and Choopolsapaisal 2015.) Buddhaghosa’s emphasis on the subjective experience of *nimittas* is echoed in Veera’s account of the variety of *nimittas*. Veera holds that the qualities of individual *nimittas* at each of the locations can vary between individual practitioners, due to the specific characteristics of that individual’s *citta*, but interestingly they do not vary between different occasions of experience by that individual. A practitioner always experiences a particular *nimitta* with the same qualities because this experience is determined by the four primary elements (*dhātu*: earth, water, fire, air) of that person’s mind, but these elements inevitably vary between individuals.⁵⁷ This in turn emphasizes the skill needed by the teacher to recognize the

56. Veera, interview September 25th, 2014.

57. That KMBL (and other *borān kammatṭhāna* sources) understands *dharmas* as being constituted by the primary elements is problematic. In classical Abhidhamma, *dharmas* are the ultimate

correct perception of *nimittas* by each individual. Other variations that occur are the proliferation of *nimittas* at each location as the practitioner becomes more accomplished — in the early stages of practice the average practitioner sees a single *nimitta* but an advanced practitioner can see many at each given location and this is a sign of the purification of their mind. At the same time, high quality experience of *nimittas* is only possible at the designated nine locations, and, as corollary to this, best practice is to follow the nine locations closely as a means to guarantee better experience of *nimittas*.⁵⁸

The emphasis on the elements (*dhātu*) of the practitioner in the explanation of variation above is also linked to possible benefits of the meditation in KMBL (and *borān kammaṭṭhāna* in general). In addition to the expected soteriological goal of *nibbāna*, Veera emphasizes two further areas of advantage or expertise which may motivate a practitioner in the practice of *ānāpānasati*: these are for the practice of healing and for *ceto-vimutti*. The former of these is achieved through understanding and manipulation of the four elements (*dhātu*) in the body and mind of the person experiencing ill-health. This can be done by the practitioner upon themselves or, by extension of their *citta*, upon another party. The relationship of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* to pre-modern medical practice is a rich field awaiting research.⁵⁹

Regarding the latter, Veera advises that *ceto-vimutti* (Thai, *jeto-vimutti*) is one of two approaches to developing *vipassanā*, the other being *paññā-vimutti*. *Ānāpānasati* helps one acquire what he calls, ‘the foundational base of *vipassanā* (Thai, *than khong vipassana*; Pali, *vipassanā-tṭhāna*)’. This *vipassanā*-base allows one to acquire *samāpatti*, *iddhi*, *abhiññā* and other additional powers on the one hand and on the other, the goal of *vipassanā* itself, i.e. *paññā*. The practitioner who acquires these qualities and powers is described as *ceto-vimutta*.

constituents that by definition cannot be further subdivided into other constituents. While this description by Veera may be another instance of a loose or adaptive usage of classical Abhidhamma terminology, the authors’ (i.e. Skilton) present understanding of this curious usage is perhaps to be partially explained with reference to the classical Abhidhamma teaching that the ultimate units of existent entities are in fact quasi-‘molecules’ known as *kalāpas*, i.e. aggregates of those *dhammas* which must always co-arise. (*Dhammas* do not arise singly, on their own, but always in mutual interdependence with other *dhammas*.) For example, the basic eight components of any living matter is a *kalāpa* made up of, as a minimum, the following *dhammas* proper: the four primary elements (*dhātu*) plus: colour; smell; taste; and nutritive essence. Other *dhammas* will be present according to the nature of the body part. Even so, to take the mind as made up of elements of material form (*rūpa*) rather than being purely mental (*citta*) which is still problematic from a classical Abhidhamma viewpoint. In pre-reform medical literature, which strongly overlaps with *borān kammaṭṭhāna*, illness is seen as arising from an imbalance of elements within the *dhammas* that make up the person. Again this is comprehensible if we understand ‘*dhamma*’ there to refer to the aggregated *dhammas*, i.e. the *kalāpa*, that form existent entities. This explanation is not offered by Veera in relation to KMBL nor has it been discovered in any other *borān kammaṭṭhāna* source to date, and the subject needs further research. On *kalāpas* in classical Theravāda Abhidhamma, i.e. as explained in the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, see Nārada 1980, 308–310.

58. Veera, interview September 25th, 2014.

59. See for example, Mettānando 1999, Chhem 2007 and Crosby 2013, 90ff. Aside from the theoretical basis on which such medical intervention would work (analysed by Crosby) and the claims made by contemporary practitioners such as Veera, the association between medicine and *borān kammaṭṭhāna* is evidenced in the association of medical manuscripts with those of the meditation tradition (see Choompolpaisal and Skilton 2011). Veera notes that *ānāpānasati* is particularly useful for improving the circulation of the blood.

In contrast, those who skip the *ānāpānasati* lesson (*hong*) and do not develop these *nimittas* will not acquire these qualities and powers, although they can still proceed to *vipassanā* meditation. Veera uses the term *paññā-vimutti* to refer to those who go on to do *vipassanā* without having these qualities and powers.⁶⁰

The KMBL account of the nine points of contact clearly shows awareness of the debates recorded by Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*, although this is not mentioned as source. However, it adapts the debate away from a discussion of the diversity of reported *nimittas* to one of justifying the implementation of the nine locations. On the one hand, Buddhaghosa appears to be concerned at the diversity of his multiple textual sources (assuming — from the way he relies on texts to extend and illustrate his discussion — that his discussion is theoretical and text-based, rather than based in personal practice); and on the other hand, the adaptation in KMBL of the stage of contact towards greater specification could be understood as occurring within a pragmatic experiential practice context. In other words what we see here is a movement away from a theoretical discussion in the *Visuddhimagga*, to a practitioner's account in which the inevitable 'next step' of designating locations for contact of the breath with the body has been taken. It is probably a natural development that a meditation practice concerned with contact of the breath and the body should eventually discuss the locations of that contact in detail. Indeed Buddhaghosa's first simile appears to understand contact in this sense, but his account falls away into a philosophical interpretation involving moments of consciousness (*citta*). Buddhaghosa's accounts of contact and fixing ultimately seem somewhat theoretical and contrived as concepts and poorly developed as practices.⁶¹ In the KMBL account they are clear and concrete practices. It is not impossible that we can see the state of the description of contact and fixing in the *Visuddhimagga* as on a developmental trajectory of which the KMBL interpretation is a more pragmatic working out.

This suggestion does beg the question of the relationship of KMBL to so-called Theravāda orthodoxy or mainstream teaching. It is certainly the case that a number of commentators have already suggested that *borān kammatṭhāna* is unorthodox.⁶² It is therefore worthwhile to note that the KMBL tradition can be seen, in its account of *ānāpānasati*, as firmly located within a quite narrow and specific lineage which we can trace as far as the *Visuddhimagga*, for as has been pointed out, the schema of the eight stages for developing this meditation subject, here abbreviated to four, is specific to the *Visuddhimagga* alone and is neither shared with non-Theravāda sources nor even with other Theravāda sources. In this sense, the present KMBL 'looks back' directly and exclusively to Buddhaghosa's account. Only comparative studies of the *ānāpānasati* (and *pīti*) practice in other *borān kammatṭhāna* sources and lineages will indicate the extent to which assimilation with the *Visuddhimagga* might be a distinctive feature of KMBL alone.

Conclusion

The mindfulness of the breath, *ānāpānasati*, is one of the most popular meditation practices in the Buddhist repertoire. It is taught in many Theravāda centres

60. Veera, interview, September 30th, 2014.

61. The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* does not offer this teaching.

62. See Crosby 2013, chapter 4 for a discussion of these opinions.

and temples and has impeccable credentials as a practice highly recommended by the Buddha and witnessed in texts dating seemingly from the earliest phases of Buddhist tradition. It is the subject of many *suttas*, including some of the most important in the canon. It is also widely known, if not practised, across Buddhist traditions, and described and explained in Mahāyāna as well as Śrāvaka treatises. It can hardly be a matter of surprise therefore to find that it has undergone ‘development’; that with the passage of centuries meditation practitioners, *phra yogāvacara*, have found reason to make adaptations. In this discussion of *ānāpānasati* in KMBL we have considered two such adaptations. One, concerning the four stages of ‘giving attention’ to the meditation subject, is unattested in the *tipitaka*, but seems to be introduced into Theravāda textual tradition in a specific 8-fold account by Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga*, part of which is used in KMBL, the lineage of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* preserved and taught at Wat Ratchasittharam. The second involves giving attention to the breath at a series of nine specified points of contact in the body and the fixing there of the *nimittas* that develop through the practice. This development is not in evidence in the *Visuddhimagga*, although we should probably refrain from jumping to conclusions on the basis of this silence — we know that silence is not positive evidence and we cannot argue that this proves that KMBL-type practices were not known in Buddhaghosa’s day. That said, the designation of specific locations in the body for the development of *nimittas* is a distinctive feature of *borān kammaṭṭhāna* practice. It is perhaps also worth noting in this respect the emphasis in KMBL on the integration of mind and body, not just through the use of bodily locations, but also through its emphasis on the role of the elements (*dhātu*) and the implicit health benefits of this. Regardless of the date of development of KMBL practice, we have seen that its practices are consistent with the account of *ānāpānasati* in the *Visuddhimagga*, and we are probably justified in seeing them as in this respect ‘orthodox’.

Bibliography

- Bizot, François. 1992. *Le Chemin de Laṅkā*. Paris, Chiang Mai, Phnom Penh: École française d’Extrême-Orient.
- Chayamangkalo, Sermchai. 1999 [2542 BE]. ตอบปัญหาธรรมปฏิบัติ [Answer the Problems of Meditation Practice]. Ratchaburi: Wat Luang Phor Sodh Dhammakayaram.
- Chhem, Rethy K. 2007. ‘La médecine au service du pouvoir angkorien: Universités monastiques, transmission du savoir et formation médicale sous le règne de Jayavarman VII (1181–1220 A. D.)’, *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies* 3: 95–124.
- Choompolpaisal, P. and A. Skilton. 2011. ‘Handlist of manuscripts at Wat Ratchasittharam’. (Available for download at <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/finding-resources/special/projects/hidden-collections/manuscripts-at-wat-ratchasittharam>).
- Choompolpaisal, P. forthcoming. ‘*Borān kammaṭṭhāna* meditation transmissions from late Ayutthaya to Rattanakosin’. Paper delivered at ‘Variety in Theravāda Meditation’ conference at King’s College London, 23rd November 2014.
- Crosby, K. 1999. ‘Studies in the medieval Pali literature of Sri Lanka with special reference to the esoteric Yogavacara tradition’. Unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford.
- . 2013 *Traditional Theravada Meditation and its Modern-Era Suppression*. Hong Kong: Buddha Dharma Centre of Hong Kong.

- de Bernon, Olivier. 2000. 'Le manuel des maître de *kammatṭhān*. Étude et présentation de méditation dans la tradition du bouddhisme khmer'. Unpublished PhD thesis, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris.
- Dhammajoti, K.L. 2009. 'The Doctrine of the Six-stage Mindfulness of Breathing'. In *Buddhist and Pali Studies in Honour of Venerable Professor K. Anuruddha*, 639–650. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong.
- Mettanando Bhikkhu. 1999. 'Meditation and Healing in the Theravada Buddhist Order of Thailand and Laos'. Unpublished PhD thesis, Hamburg.
- Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu. 1997. *The Path of Discrimination (Paṭisambhidāmagga)*. Oxford: Pali Text Society.
- . 2010. *The Path of Purification Visuddhimagga*. 4th edition. Colombo: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Nārada Mahā Thera. 1980. 4th ed. *A Manual of Abhidhamma being Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha of Bhadanta Anuruddhācariya*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Rhys Davids, C.A.F. 1975 (originally two volumes, 1920 and 1921). *The Visuddhi-Magga of Buddhaghosa*. London: Pali Text Society.
- Ronruen, S., B. Evans and Phaisan Nangnoi. no date. *How to Practice Calm and Insight Meditation (Samatha-Vipassanā Kammatṭhāna)*. Bangkok: Wat Rajasiddharam.
- Skilling, Peter. 2014. 'Reflections on the Pali Literature of Siam'. In *From Birch Bark to Digital Data: Recent Advances in Buddhist Manuscript Research*, edited by Paul Harrison and Jens-Uwe Hartmann, 347–366. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Skilton, A. and P. Choompolpaisal. 2015. 'The Practice of pre-reform Theravāda meditation, *borān kammatṭhāna*, from Wat Ratchasittharam: the *pīti* section of the *kammatthana majjima baeb lamdub*', *Aséanie* 33 (pagination unavailable).
- Thanaveero, Veera. 2007 [2550 BE]. สมณะ-วิปัสสนากรรมฐานมัชฌิมา แบบลำดับ (เจโตวิมุตติ) ของสมเด็จพระสังฆราช (สุก โกเถื่อน) [*Majjima Baeb Lamdub Samatha-Vipassana Meditation (Jeto Vimutti) by Somdet Phrasangkharat (Suk Kaitheun)*] Bangkok: C&S Printing.
- Thanaveero, Veera. 2013 [2556 BE]. สมณะวิปัสสนา จากพระไตรปิฎก [*Samatha-Vipassana jak phra Traipidok (Samatha-vipassanā from the Tipiṭaka)*] Nonthaburi: Sampachanya Press.