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

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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 \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} or ‘ancient meditation’ tradition, is virtually unknown in mainstream western scholarship and has almost disappeared in Theravadā 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 \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} 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 \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} meditation in detail. Specifically, we will give a detailed description of the meditation procedure for developing ‘mindfulness of the breath’ \textit{ānāpānasati} (Pali; Thai, \textit{anapanasati}) as transmitted at Wat Ratchasittharam, Thonburi, where one strand of \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} is preserved.\(^3\) This temple transmits a lineage of \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} taught by the fourth Rattanakosin \textit{saṅgharāja} (Thai; Pali, \textit{saṅgharāja}; ‘Supreme Patriarch’), Suk Kaitheun (Somdet Yannasangvorn, 1733–1822). This lineage is known now as \textit{Kammatthan Majjima Baeb Lamdub}, ‘Progressive (Mind-)Training in the Middle Way Employing Meditation Subjects’ (hereafter KMBL).

It is our preliminary assumption, supported by observation, that \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} 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 \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} 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 \textit{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 \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} 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 \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} 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 \textit{borān kammatṭhāna} 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’). 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’). 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. 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) 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 rūpa-jjhāna 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 Choompolpaisal, 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’; khaṇikā, ‘momentary’; okkantikā, ‘showering’; ubbegā, ‘uplifting’; and pharaṇā, ‘per-vading’. 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 pītis, is moved between these locations in various sequences, e.g. 12345::54321 (kao lamdub), and 132435::534231 (kao sab).

8. The six pairs are the following states experienced in body and mind: calmness (passaddhi), lightness (lahutā), pliancy (mudutā), adaptability (kammaññatā), competence (pagaṇṭatā) and rectitude (ajukatā).
five of Wat Ratchasittharam, the meditation section of that temple (Thanaveero 2007). 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), 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). 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.

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

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).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual lessons (Thai–Pali)</th>
<th>Major divisions or steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. peeti, pīti</td>
<td>phra phuttha khun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. yukhon, yugala</td>
<td>buddha-guṇa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. gaya- and jitta sukha, kāya- and citta-sukha</td>
<td>rupam kammatthan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. anapanasati, ānāpānasati</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. gayakata sati, kāyagatā sati</td>
<td>rūpa-kammaṭṭhāna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. gasin, kasina</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. asupa, asubha</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. rupachan, rūpajjhāṇa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. anussati, anussati</td>
<td>arupa kammatthan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. phrom viharn, brahma-vihāra</td>
<td>arūpa-kammaṭṭhāna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. ahare patikula sanyā, āhārarepañjikulasaṭṭhāna</td>
<td>arūpa-kammaṭṭhāna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. jatu dhatuvatthan, catudhātuvatthāna</td>
<td>arūpa-kammaṭṭhāna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. arupa chan, arūpajjhāṇa</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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1. Perception of the repulsiveness of food.
2. Definition of the four elements.

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 kammaṭṭhāna, 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.). 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 kammaṭṭhānas — 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 kammaṭṭhāna litanies.

It may help clarify this usage to point out that in KMBL these three terms address the same phenomena from different aspects. Kammaṭṭhāna (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. Thus the kammaṭṭhānas are actually experienced in the ānāpānasati meditation stage as nimittas because this is how a meditator directly experiences all medita-

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

Nimitta objects. 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. 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 so we may 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.

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. 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.

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

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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 (anapanasati 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 (anapanasati 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 arahaṃ x323 [and] arahaṃ 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-

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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 Choompolpaisal 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 kammatthan)

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).’ 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 (satipatṭhāna). Anyone who has cultivated the four foundations of mindfulness to the perfect level will be able to cultivate the seven Limbs of Awakening (satta bojjhanga). The perfect conditions of the seven Limbs of Awakening will enable one to gain knowledge (vijjā) and liberation (vimutti). They are the proximate cause (padatthāna) 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 kammatthan 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 kammatthāna sources.
26. In this passage the text paraphrases three suttas: firstly here, Mahārāhulovāda-sutta MN 62.
27. Icchānāgala-sutta SN.54.2.11 (at SV V 325–326). The sutta reads: ānāpānasatīsamādhiḥ sammā vadāmāno vadeyya: ‘ariyavihāro’ itipī, ‘brahmavihāro’ itipī, ‘tathāgatavihāro’ itipī. The KMBL passage shows, by adding a gloss concerning dhamma, how borān kammatthāna 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 kammatthan) which has a patibhāga nimitta.\(^{28}\) Regarding absorption concentration, the traditional teachers (Thai, borannajan; Pali, porāṇa-ācariya), for example Somdet Sangharat Suk Kaithheun, have taught that practitioners should cultivate the mindfulness of breath meditation subject, which is the great honorable meditation subject (phra kammatthan).\(^{29}\) At the beginning practitioners start by cultivating calming meditation subjects (samatha kammatthan) 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 kammatthan), the teachers give the following instructions as summarized below:

1. \(\text{gaṇanā (Pali; Thai, kanana)}\) 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, patilom), in reverse direction.

2. \(\text{anubandhanā (Pali; Thai, anupantana)}\) 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. \(\text{phussanā (Pali; Thai phutsana)}\) 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. \(\text{ṭhapanā (Pali; Thai tapana)}\) 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.

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

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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.

To cultivate mindfulness of the breath at the level of calming (samatha), 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. 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
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
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) 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

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32. KMBL and other borān kammaṭṭhāna 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 subject] entities (phra [kammatthan] dhamma jao) be my refuge, may their honorable majesties the community of the noble ones (phra arīya sangha jao) from the beginning starting with his honorable majesty, the Great Mahākōṇḍañña the Elder (phra maha anyakondanya thera 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 kammatthan jao) be my refuge. May all their honorable majesties the meditation subjects be my refuge.

Permit me! (ukāsa!) Permit me! Here [and now] 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] itipi so bhagavā arahaṃ sammā sambuddho vijjācaraṇasampanno sugato lokavidu anuttaro purisadammāsārathī satthā devamanussānaṃ buddho bhagavā ti.
[recite] sammā arahaṃ 3 times
[recite] arahaṃ 3 times
(Breathing out, meditate counting 1 2 3 4 5; breathing in, meditate counting 5 4 3 2 1.) (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. 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. 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.

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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.
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 *Icchānaṅgala-sutta*. This is followed by a paragraph explaining that the general goal of KMBL meditation is first to attain access concentration and then move

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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. Specifically we are referring to Buddhaghosa’s account of the stages of ‘giving attention’ (manasikāravidhi) 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.)

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’.

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 kasiṇa.

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, samathā, the explicit goal of this level of practice in KMBL.

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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 ṭhapanā, to the opening four of all the other sources he consults: gaṇanā, anuṣṭhānā, sthāpanā and upalākṣaṇā. These sources include Abhidharmakośa, Jietuodaolun (=*Vimuttimagga/Vimuktimarga), Yogācārabhūmi, two Chinese āgama translations of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna-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’. 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 (Nāṇamoli 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 Nāṇamoli’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 (Nāṇamoli 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* (Nāṇamoli 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 out-breath 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). ‘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 (ṭhapanā), 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. 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. The practitioner should focus on experiencing the breath mak-
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 kammatṭhāna mentioned at the start of this article, it can be noted that the dhammakaya 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).
advised by one’s teacher to do them all (from āpanā 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 preceed 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

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 Paṭisambhidāmagga 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). This is the closest Buddhaghosa seems to get to defining fixing. This aligns well with the explanation offered in KMBL.

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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 nimitteyeva cittaṃ ṭhapetabbo. 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 Majjhimabhāṇakas, 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 Choompolpaisal 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

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57. That KMBL (and other borān kammatṭhāna sources) understands dhammas as being constituted by the primary elements is problematic. In classical Abhidhamma, dhammas 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-ṭṭhāna).’ 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.
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 kammaṭṭhāna 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 kammaṭṭhāna 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

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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 tipiṭaka, 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 kammatthāna 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 kammatthāna 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’.

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