

Breathing Meditation for Purification

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Preparation: Set your body into a nice meditation posture. Take a few deep breaths in and out, feeling the weight of your body on the cushion.

Motivation: Set a motivation for the practice thinking “How wonderful it would be if my self and all sentient beings were to be free of suffering and attain the state of full enlightenment. May we be free of suffering and attain full enlightenment. I myself will bring this about!” Therefore, I am going to do this special meditation for purification.

Body of the meditation:

Visualize Compassion Buddha, Tara, or Medicine Buddha, etc.

As you inhale, light from the deity’s heart, which is in the nature of great compassion, blesses all sentient beings. It fills the whole body and mind with great compassion, in the heart. Keep the mind in that state for awhile, in that feeling of great compassion towards every sentient being, without discrimination, feeling their suffering and generating the thought to free them all from the sufferings and problems, by oneself.

Then exhale all the defilements, all the delusions, negative karma, negative imprints and particularly the ego. It comes out as you exhale in the form of smoke or pollution. It goes beyond this world. This is using the breathing meditation for purification.

Then again, as you inhale slowly, again light comes from the heart of Compassion Buddha. Think that it is the essence of wisdom, the fully awakened mind, the omniscient mind, in the form of white light. It fills the whole body and mind. Keep the mind in that state.

Then exhale all the defilements, negative karma, and negative imprints, particularly ignorance. It comes out in the form of smoke or pollution, like pollution comes from a chimney. It goes away from beyond the world. Think you are completely purified.

Then inhale, again light comes from the heart of Compassion Buddha, think that it is the essence of power, power to be able to help everyone, to free them immediately, to be able to free them from all the problems, the sufferings and the causes of sufferings.

This thought is the highest thought: to free them from negative imprints and for them to achieve perfect happiness immediately, to free them from the suffering and the causes of sufferings. Think that the light is perfect power to give temporal and ultimate happiness all the way up to enlightenment. Receive this in the form of white light, the whole body and mind is filled with white light in the nature of perfect power to do perfect works for all sentient beings, like the Buddha.

Dedication: Due to all the three times merits accumulated by myself, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and all sentient beings, may myself and all sentient beings quickly attain the fully enlightened state. May I quickly achieve the realizations of perfect compassion, wisdom, and power, and be a source of perfect benefit to all.

Meditation on the Clear Light Nature of the Conventional Mind

Introduction

The meditation I have found most useful through the years is one introduced to me by my kind guru, Lama Yeshe. I call this a meditation on the clear light nature of the conventional mind, and I find it a great inspiration. It reminds me of our potential to remove all harmful states of mind and replace them, in the clarity of our minds, with wholesome states such as compassion and wisdom. Some great teachers, such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama, actually refer to this clarity of the mind as the conventional buddha potential (the actual buddha potential is said to be the ultimate nature of the mind, its emptiness). This meditation helps to lift the depressed mind, quiet the troubled mind, and concentrate it.

It prepares us to meditate on emptiness and, as well, is a superb preparation for tantric visualization. The meditation itself is drawn from the experiences of the great yogis of the past, especially those from the Mahamudra tradition. All our experiences are conditioned by our mental state. We are constantly engaged in a mental conversation of which we are unaware, and we respond to various events out of our subjective judgments, which are often erroneous and harmful. I like to say that this meditation helps us familiarize ourselves with the laboratory of the mind. In this laboratory we can observe these disturbing factors and can perform the great spiritual experiments that were done by the great masters of the past.

Preparation: The actual meditation requires a good degree of concentration and subtlety of mind, so I find it useful to begin with meditation on the breath as an aid in bringing the mind to such a state. Sit comfortably with the back erect and focus on the breath as though you were asked to listen to it—that is, without trying to control it or judge it: “Oh, that was a good one”! Watch the breath as it comes in, pauses, goes out, pauses, comes in, etc. Focus particularly at the end points, where the mind has the tendency to be lazy and occupy itself with fantasies or other thoughts. Put all your mental energy into concentration and simply ignore other thoughts that might tempt you: just let the thoughts go by.

If you are beginning such practice, you might find that mentally counting the cycles of respiration (i.e., this is the first inhalation, now it is changing direction, this is the first exhalation...) will help you notice and let go of distracting thoughts. It is like having both your hands full and being offered a cup of tea—there is no way to take it unless you give up one of the objects in your hands.

Body of the meditation:

When the mind has become somewhat focused, follow one inhalation up the nostrils, down to the area of the heart chakra, and away from the head, the area more associated with conceptual thought. Place your attention on the mind itself instead of on the respiration. Remind yourself that you are not paying attention to the other five senses, but to the sixth sense, the mental consciousness. Spend some time at first observing the thoughts and images that are constantly flowing through the mind. Just observe the thoughts without getting involved with them. It is like when you are sitting at a streetside cafe watching the people passing by; one just notes them but does not get up and follow them down the street. Try to get familiar with the laboratory of the mind.

Try to notice the quiet moments between thoughts and focus on those as one previously focused on the breath. Then, whenever a thought arises and distracts you from focusing on the clear quiet nature of the mind, let go of your attention to that objective thought and refocus your attention on the subjective mind within which the thought is appearing, the clear quiet nature of the mind itself. The Buddha and the great practitioners after him have said that the nature of the mind is clear light: nonmaterial, unobstructed by thoughts, and posing no obstruction to them. Try to focus your attention on this clear light nature of the mind within which all mental events occur. The mind can be likened to an ocean, and the thoughts and other mental events to fish swimming through that clear medium.

We are ordinarily unaware of the nature of the mind and instead observe only the fish-like thoughts. It is as though we were observing an aquarium through a large glass wall and at first only noticed the fish. If someone were to tell us to observe the clear water within which the fish were swimming, we might at first have difficulty noticing it because of its transparency. But by simply realizing that the fish could not be moving unless there was some substance to move in, we can take our attention away from observing the fish and focus instead on the clear water.

In a similar fashion, try again and again to let go of attention to the fish-like thoughts and try to recognize the clear-light nature of the mind within which all mental events occur. In the case of the aquarium, the fish will remain before us when focusing on the water. However, when we focus our attention on the clear-light nature of the mind, the thoughts begin to diminish in intensity and frequency, thereby quieting the mind and enhancing our ability to concentrate.

Dedication: By this virtue may I quickly attain the state of a fully awakened being and become exactly what is needed to benefit for all.

Colophon: Reprinted with permission from *Spiritual Friends: Meditations by Monks and Nuns of the International Mahayana Institute*, Wisdom Publications, www.wisdompubs.com.

Meditation on Compassion

Preparation: Start by taking just a minute or two to focus on your physical body, finding the most beneficial position with your spine straight and erect, a position in which you can be aware and awake, but not stiff or rigid. Feel the weight of your body, its substantial, earthy character. Become present in the moment and place where you are.

Now continue with a 5-minute breathing meditation. Focus the attention on the breath (the sensation of the breath flowing in and out at the opening of the nostrils). Let all thoughts go, like clouds in the sky. If distractions arise, be aware of them without getting involved and without judgment, then gently bring the attention back to the breath.

Motivation: Create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Think that you are meditating not just for your own well-being or peace of mind or good reputation, but you are taking the time now to meditate and develop a compassionate mind to reach the state of enlightenment where you can most skillfully benefit all beings.

The main body of the meditation:

Start by imagining that you are surrounded by all sentient beings, who are in the form of human beings. Your father is seated on your right, your mother on your left. Behind you are all your friends and family members ... those you are close to. In front of you are all the sentient beings that you have difficulty with or that you dislike ... your “enemies.” Surrounding you in all directions as far as you can see are all remaining sentient beings. They are all seated and facing you.

Now spend some time thinking of the sufferings of sentient beings. Contemplate the gross level sufferings of sentient beings in the human realm and in the other realms of cyclic existence. These include sufferings of the body: illness, injury, torture, death, pain, and so on; sufferings of the mind: anxiety, depression, grief, anguish, as well as the sufferings of the mind’s delusions: anger, pride, attachment, jealousy, rage, hatred, obsession, and so on; the sufferings of being born in each realm of samsara, especially in the lower realms: as a hell being, as a hungry ghost, as an animal; the general sufferings of samsara, such as meeting with unpleasant circumstances and people; not encountering desirable people and circumstances; having the things you desire taken away from you; being given things you do not want. Also, remember the subtle suffering of simply being born in cyclic existence, that is, with a body and mind pervaded by the causes of suffering so that suffering is indeed inevitable.

As you contemplate these sufferings of others, remember at the same time the kindness of sentient beings, that is, how there is nothing good or desirable that you have that did not come to you from the kindness of sentient beings. Food, clothing, shelter, all the physical things you have only came to you in dependence on others. That you are alive is thanks to the kindness of your mother and your family. Your education and, therefore, your achievements in life due to your education and skills ... you only have these because of the kindness of others who taught you, who helped you, who enabled you to go to school, and so on. And the kindness of other sentient beings is something that you have received during infinite lifetimes from countless sentient beings. There is not one sentient being who has not been kind to you in many, many lives.

Now think:

All sentient beings, including myself, are suffering tremendously. And because of our ignorance, we are forever seeking happiness in our lives, but we are continuously creating the causes of suffering for ourselves and others. Each sentient being has been unspeakably kind to me in all my past lives.

First, generate compassion for yourself:

How wonderful it would be if I were free of all suffering for now and forever. May I cause myself to be free of all my suffering. Contemplate this thought strongly in your mind.

Place your attention at your heart-center. Don't "look" at your heart-center as if from above (as if you are your eyes). Instead, actually "become" your heart-center. You are "in" your heart. Now imagine that the compassionate thought you have been contemplating manifests in the form of radiant golden light at your heart-center. As you contemplate the thought of compassion toward yourself, your compassion in the form of this radiant golden light fills your heart-center and your entire body. You are completely enveloped, filled, and purified by your compassion.

Now, generate compassion for all other sentient beings in the same way:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free of all suffering for now and forever. May I cause them to be free of all their suffering. Contemplate this thought strongly in your mind.

Again, place your attention at your heart-center. You are your heart-center. Now imagine that your compassionate thought that has manifested in the form of radiant golden light at your heart-center radiates outward, encompassing all sentient beings. Imagine this gradually: first the light pervades those who are immediately around you. Then it expands to pervade your entire community ... then your country ... your hemisphere ... your entire planet ... the entire universe ... All sentient beings in all realms of existence anywhere are completely enveloped by the golden radiating light of your compassion.

Contemplate this as long as you can with a concentrated mind.

When your concentration begins to wane, gradually reabsorb the golden light of your compassion back into your heart. It remains there as a small golden seed, always activated, always alive within you.

Make this determination: may all sentient beings be free of every suffering, both gross and subtle, and may I cause them to be free of all suffering, from today forward. Having genuinely generated this thought within you, stop all thinking processes and simply remain concentrated on this determination with single-pointed focus, allowing it to absorb into the deeper levels of your mind.

Dedication

Having made this effort to achieve a more compassionate attitude, may I quickly generate all positive qualities of kindness and compassion and remove all negativities and obscurations of self-cherishing from my mind. May I swiftly awaken to the state of supreme enlightenment and lead all other beings to that supreme state.

Meditation on Shakyamuni Buddha

Preparation: Start with a 5-minute breathing meditation. Focus the attention on the breath (the sensation of the breath flowing in and out at the opening of the nostrils). Let all thoughts go, like clouds in the sky. If distractions arise, be aware of them without getting involved and without judgment, then gently bring the attention back to the breath.

Motivation: When the mind is calm and quiet and you feel relaxed and focused, create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Think that you are meditating not just for your own individual intellectual or emotional benefit, but you are taking the time now to meditate and develop your mind to reach a state where you can benefit all beings.

Body of the meditation: As you generate the bodhicitta motivation, imagine that seated around you are your friends and family, and seated around them are all sentient beings, who, just like you, wish for happiness and wish to avoid any kind of suffering. Bring to mind that, just like you, all these beings suffer in different ways. Feel that you are doing the meditation for yourself and also on behalf of all these beings.

Visualize (imagine) in front of you, at the level of your forehead, about 6 - 8 feet in front of you, Buddha Shakyamuni. He is made of light, very bright and clear, transparent.

Begin with visualizing a large golden throne, made of light. On the throne is a white lotus, then a cushion of sunlight and a cushion of moonlight. These represent the three principles of the path - the lotus represents renunciation, the sun cushion represents the wisdom realizing emptiness, and the moon cushion represents bodhicitta.

Seated upon the throne, facing you, is Shakyamuni Buddha. His holy body is the colour of fine gold, made of light. He is wearing the saffron robes of a monk, and is sitting in the vajra, or full lotus position. The palm of his right hand rests on his right knee, with his fingers touching the moon cushion, signifying his great control over all delusions. His left hand is in his lap in the posture of meditative concentration, and holds an alms bowl filled with nectar, which represents the medicine which can cure our delusions.

Buddha Shakyamuni's face is very beautiful, and very peaceful. He smiles at you with eyes filled with love and compassion. He has blue-black hair, and an ushnisha (a crown protrusion). Feel very strongly that you are in the presence of an enlightened being, who understands and accepts you just as you are, and who strongly wishes to help you to reach his state of enlightenment.

Visualize that rays of light are emanating from each pore of Buddha's holy body, reaching every corner of the universe. The rays are actually composed of countless miniature buddhas, some going out to help living beings, some dissolving back into his body having completed their work.

Develop an attitude of taking refuge in the Buddha's enlightened qualities, recognizing that by applying the medicine of the Buddha's teachings we can become enlightened ourselves. Make a request from your heart to the Buddha for his blessings that you can

become free from all negative energy and misconceptions and develop all the realizations of the path to enlightenment.

Feel that your request has been granted, and a stream of purifying white light flows from Buddha's heart and enters your body through the crown of your head. Feel that all your negativities have been dispelled, and that you are filled with blissful white light.

Recite Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra:

TAYATA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

Then make a strong request to the Buddha for his blessings that you can develop all his enlightened qualities for the benefit of all sentient beings (which includes yourself). Feel that your request has been granted, and visualize that a stream of golden light flows from the Buddha's heart, entering your crown chakra and bringing all the qualities of enlightened body, speech and mind in the form of this golden light. Imagine that your body is completely filled with this golden light, and that you feel great bliss.

Recite the Buddha's mantra.

Next, visualize that Buddha Shakyamuni comes to the crown of your head, facing the same direction as you. Then focus on all beings visualized sitting around you, and generate love and compassion for them. As you generate this love and compassion, recite the Buddha's mantra and imagine that rays of light, in the nature of wisdom and compassion, radiate out from the Buddha's heart to all beings, bringing them all the qualities of enlightened body, speech and mind. Feel very strongly that all their negativities are purified, and that they themselves become perfectly enlightened, experiencing great bliss and wisdom.

Then visualize that the Buddha melts into pure golden light, which absorbs into you. Imagine your ordinary concept of yourself dissolves, and you become union oneness with the enlightened body, speech and mind, one with the Buddha's blissful, omniscient mind in the aspect of vast empty space. Rest in that blissful space for as long as you can before distractions arise.

Finally, rejoice in having done this meditation and created the cause to be able to enlighten yourself and others.

Dedication: Now dedicate any benefit you have gained from doing this meditation towards attaining a perfect state of mind where you can benefit countless beings.

Meditation on Perfect Human Rebirth

Preparation: Start by focusing briefly on the position of your body, finding the most beneficial position with your spine straight and erect, a position in which you can be aware and awake, but not stiff or rigid.

Then focus your attention on the breath, letting go of your thoughts and allowing them to pass through, like clouds in the sky. Imagine that with every inhalation you are breathing in purifying blissful white light, and that with every exhalation you breath out negative energy of body and mind, negative thoughts and pains and sickness, in the form of black smoke. Do this for a few minutes.

Motivation: Remember why you are sitting and meditating. Think that you are seeking to understand your mind and your life more deeply in order to become a better person, and ultimately in order to overcome the limitations that are keeping you from fulfilling your highest human potential and achieving a fully awakened existence.

The Main Practice: (For this meditation, have before you the complete list of the eight freedoms and ten endowments.)

Analytical meditation: Meditate on the points of the topic of perfect human rebirth using the following steps, applying these points to your own life and situation and finding examples and reasoning that is effective for your own mind:

Step 1: Recognition of the 8 freedoms and 10 endowments.

Step 2: Contemplation of the great value of the perfect human rebirth (in 3 parts).

Step 2a: The temporal value: enabling one to attain higher rebirth in the future.

Step 2b: The ultimate value: enabling one to attain full enlightenment.

Step 2c: The moment by moment value: the preciousness of every moment of a perfect human rebirth.

Step 3: The rarity of the perfect human rebirth (in 3 parts).

Step 3a: The rarity of the causes of receiving the perfect human rebirth.

- (1) practice of morality
- (2) practice of generosity
- (3) pure prayers

Step 3b: The difficulty of obtaining the perfect human rebirth illustrated by examples.

- (1) The example of the blind turtle surfacing in the ocean through a floating golden yoke.
- (2) The example of throwing a handful of peas against a wall ... how many of them will stick to the wall.
- (3) The example of pouring mustard seeds over the tip of a pin ... how many will stay on the tip.

Step 3c: The rarity of obtaining the perfect human rebirth in terms of numbers.

- (1) The number of beings with perfect human rebirth compared with the total number of sentient beings is like a handful of dust compared to all the dust in the world.

Step 4: Concluding determination:

Having received a perfect human rebirth, with the profound opportunities to attain higher rebirth, liberation, or even full enlightenment, if I do not utilize this rare and precious opportunity to achieve these goals, then this life has been wasted.

Therefore, I **MUST** take the essence of this precious life and practice the Dharma, using my life in the most beneficial way possible to bring only happiness to others and thereby create only future happiness for myself.

Once you have come to this conclusion, cease all analytical thought-based contemplation and single-pointedly focus on this thought, letting your mind simply rest in and concentrate on this strong determination.

Dedication: Dedicate any positive energy and merit to be able to protect and fulfill one's perfect human rebirth and to attain a perfect human rebirth in all one's future lives, in order to progress on the spiritual path and reach enlightenment quickly to bring ultimate happiness to others.

Inner Heat Meditation

This meditation is an especially powerful Vajrayana method for tapping and skillfully utilizing our innate blissful mental energy.

There is an intimate relationship between our mind and subtle nervous system. Mental energy flows through the body within a psychic nervous system composed of thousands of thin, transparent, subtle channels. The principal ones—known as the central, right and left channels—run parallel to and just in front of the spinal column. Pure mental energy can function only within the central channel, whereas deluded energy flows through all the others.

At present, our central channel is blocked by knots of negative energy—anger, jealousy, desire, pride and so forth—at points (*chakras*) corresponding to the base of the spine, navel, heart, throat and crown. To the extent that this deluded energy is active, the pure energy of mind is blocked and unable to function. Recall, for example, the enormous physical and mental tension created by strong desire or anger; there is no space at all for calmness and clarity.

The inner heat meditation is an excellent method for transforming this powerful energy and developing spontaneous control over all our actions of body, speech and mind. Mere suppression of attachment, anger and other emotions does not eliminate them; it compounds them. The solution is literally to transform this energy—which by its nature is neither good nor bad—into blissful, free-flowing energy.

Skillful practice of the meditation will show us that we are capable of happiness and satisfaction without needing to rely upon external objects—an idea that is inconceivable for most of us.

This practice also helps us in our development of single pointed concentration. Normally, our dissatisfied mind wanders uncontrollably, blown here and there by the force of deluded energy in the psychic channels; yet if we could have an experience of bliss pleasurable enough to concentrate on, we simply would not *want* to wander elsewhere.

The Practice

Motivation

Sit comfortably in your meditation place and generate a strong positive motivation for doing this inner heat practice. Determine to keep your mind relaxed, concentrated and free of expectations for the entire session.

Start by visualizing the central channel as a transparent, hollow tube, a finger's breadth in diameter. It runs straight down through the centre of the body, just in front of the spinal column, from the crown of your head to the base of your spine.

Next, visualize the right and left lateral channels, slightly thinner than the central one. They start from the right and left nostrils respectively, travel upward to the top of the head and then curve over to run downward on either side of the central channel. They curve inward and join the central channel at a point approximately four fingers' breadth below the level of the navel.

Take as long as you like to construct this visualization. Once it is stable, imagine a red-hot ember the size of a tiny seed inside the central channel at the level of the navel. To strengthen this visualization, imagine reaching into a fire, taking out a tiny glowing ember and placing it in your central channel. Once it is there, really feel its intense heat.

Now, in order to increase the heat, gently contract the muscles of the pelvic floor, concentrating on the internal rather than the external muscles, and in this way bring air energy up from the lowest chakra to the ember.

Next, gently take a full breath through both nostrils. The air travels from the nostrils down through the right and left channels to where they enter the central channel just below the level of the navel. The air joins with the heat there and with the energy brought up from below.

As you stop inhaling, immediately swallow and push down gently with your diaphragm in order to firmly compress the energy brought down from above: now the air energy is completely locked in, compressed from above and below.

Now, hold your breath as long as it is comfortable to do so. Concentrate completely on the ember in the navel area, whose heat is increasing and spreading as a result of the compressed air energy.

When you are ready, relax your lightly tensed muscles and exhale gently and completely. Although the air leaves through the nostrils, visualize that it rises up through the central channel and dissolves there. The heat emanating from the burning ember at the navel continually increases and spreads and starts to burn away the blockages at each chakra and

starts also to warm the concentration of silvery blissful energy found at the crown chakra.

However, the focal point of your concentration is always the heat of the burning ember in the navel area.

Once your first exhalation is complete, again tighten the lower muscles, inhale a second time, swallow and push down with the diaphragm, thus again compressing the air and intensifying the heat. Hold your breath and concentrate on the heat, then exhale, releasing the air up the central channel once again.

Repeat the entire cycle rhythmically seven times altogether, the intensity of the heat growing with each breath.

At the seventh exhalation, imagine that the now burning hot ember explodes into flames. They shoot up the central channel, completely consuming and purifying the deluded energy at each chakra. At the crown, the flames finally melt and release the silvery blissful energy, which pours down the purified central channel giving increasing pleasure at each chakra it passes. Finally, when it meets the blazing ember at the navel chakra, there is an explosion of bliss. This blissful heat flows out to every atom and cell of your body, completely filling you, making your mind very happy.

Concentrate on this pleasure without tension or expectation; without clinging to it or analyzing it. Just relax and enjoy it.

You will notice that, no matter how strong the pleasure is, your mind and body are calm and controlled, unlike our usual experiences of physical pleasure when the mind is excited and uncontrolled.

If your mind should wander from its concentration to other objects—the past or future, objects of attachment or aversion—focus your attention on the *subject* of the thought, the mind that perceives the distracting object, the thinker. Watch the subject until the distracting thought disappears, then concentrate again on the blissful feeling.

Analysis of feeling: Having reached a state of clarity, it is good to use it to discover the nature of your mind. After concentrating on your feeling, being absorbed in it for some time, analyze it by contemplating each of the following questions. Take as long as you like.

Is the feeling permanent or impermanent? How? Why?

Is the feeling blissful or suffering? How? Why?

Is the feeling related or unrelated to the nervous system and the mind? How? Why?

Does the feeling exist inherently, from its own side, without depending on anything else, or not? How? Why?

Examine each point from every angle.

Dedication

Finish the session by summing up your conclusion, then dedicate any positive energy and insight gained during the meditation to your speedy enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

Colophon:

Extracted from *How to Meditate* by Kathleen McDonald and reprinted with permission from Wisdom Publications: www.wisdompubs.com

VARIOUS BREATHING MEDITATIONS

Preparation: Start by focusing on your physical body, finding the most beneficial position with your spine straight and erect, a position in which you can be aware and awake, but not stiff or rigid. Feel the weight of your body, its substance and earthy character. Become present in the moment and place where you are.

Motivation: Create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Think that you are meditating not just for your own individual benefit, but you are taking the time now to meditate and develop your mind to reach the state of enlightenment where you can most skillfully benefit all beings.

Body of the meditation:

The Nine-Round Breathing

This is a very helpful technique for relaxing the body and mind before developing meditative concentration on any topic.

Begin by visualizing the three psychic channels within our body through which the wind energy moves. The channels are round and hollow, the size of a straw, and very fine, smooth, flexible and luminous. The central channel is blue, the right channel is red, and the left channel is white. The left and right channels run from the left and right nostrils down along the spine to end four fingerwidths below the navel. The blue central channel runs from a point midway between the eyebrows, down along the spine also to the point four fingerwidths below the navel. For this meditation, visualize that the ends of the right and left channels join the central channel at this point four fingerwidths below the navel.

Holding the left nostril closed with an index finger, inhale slowly and fully through the right nostril, sending the breath all the way down to the end of the right channel. Imagine that the breath flows from the right into the left channel as you move your index finger to hold the right nostril closed. Now exhale slowly and fully through the left nostril. As the breath leaves the left nostril, imagine that all impurities (such as distraction and mental dullness) are expelled with the breath.

Repeat twice (three breaths in all), inhaling through the right nostril and exhaling through the left.

Now reverse the process. Holding the right nostril closed with your index finger, take a deep breath through the left nostril, sending the breath all the way down to the end of the left channel. As the breath moves into the right channel, move your index finger to hold the left nostril closed. Exhale slowly and fully through the right nostril. As the breath leaves the right nostril, imagine that all impurities are expelled with the breath.

Repeat twice (three breaths in all), inhaling through the left nostril and exhaling through the right.

Now inhale slowly and deeply through both nostrils, sending the air down the side channels. The breath is then exhaled up the central channel. Breathe out, expelling all impurities through both nostrils. Repeat twice (three breaths in all).

Now imagine that the three channels are completely clean and luminous. Keep breathing gently and evenly, imagining your breath flowing freely through the channels.

Counting

A good technique for building concentration.

As you inhale and exhale, count each inhalation and exhalation together as one. Count from one to ten, focusing on your breathing. When you reach ten, begin again at one.

If you become distracted, begin again at one. Even if you never get past two, it is not a problem! The point is to train your mind to focus on the breath, and this concentration can take some practice to attain.

Using imagery

This technique is particularly helpful if you are feeling very distracted or sleepy.

As you exhale, imagine that you exhale black smoke, which represents all your mental dullness, your distractions and preoccupations, any physical or mental discomfort.

As you inhale, imagine that you inhale bright white light, which represents mental awareness, concentration, and peaceful focus.

Developing Mindfulness

An essential technique for any meditation practice (mindfulness is what tells us when we are distracted), and also for general balance in our daily life.

Use your breath as the anchor of your attention. With a corner of your mind, be aware as the different mental and physical sensations arise. Merely observe, without getting involved.

It may be helpful to label the sensations – “thinking,” “tingle in the foot,” “hearing,” etc. Be aware of your labeling, especially if labels become judgments – “doing badly,” “doing well,” “bored,” and so on. If you notice you begin to get into a story, just let go of the process by returning to your breath.

As your mindfulness becomes more subtle, you will be aware of the beginning, duration, and cessation of the sensations.

Dedication

Having made this effort to achieve a more calm and focused state of mind, may I quickly generate all positive qualities and remove all negativities and obscurations. May I swiftly awaken to the state of supreme enlightenment and lead all other beings to that supreme state.