

MINDFUL HAPPINESS

Using Breath as Your Object of Meditation

-A Deeper Understanding-

In the *Satipatthana Sutra* the Buddha noted that meditation practice was necessary for success on the path to liberation and enlightenment. He noted that it could take many, many years of practice to achieve this experiential goal. The good news is that Buddha also noted it could take as little time as seven days of concentrated meditation practice. Although this reality is highly unlikely, it may be possible. Another important teaching included how to follow the middle way - neither indulgence nor asceticism, neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Just stay in the middle - a central course without extremes! Part of his teaching included core information about suffering, suffering as the main unsatisfactory aspect of living. According to these teachings impermanence, attachment, desire, craving, clinging, avoiding and unwholesome thinking or acting all cause suffering; if we cannot overcome these conditioned habits, we will continue to suffer. The way out of being impacted by suffering is to practice meditation and the Eight Fold Path.

Here we will review certain practices that use the breath as the focus of meditation attention.

The breath is a key basis for the foundation of mindfulness in the body.

The practices are listed below.

- 1) You may practice one-pointed attention to the flow of your breath in and out just as it is. Simply be mindfully aware of the breath.
- 2) You may continue to breathe freely, but now bring full attention to the flow of breath at the nostrils. In and out. In and out. Feel the air move.
- 3) You may also count your breaths. This may help reduce distracted thinking. By adding cognitive counting to the sensation of air flow more of the brain is focused on the breath. A good practice is to count silently from one to ten on the out-breath; hold the count until the end of the out-breath. If you lose count, catch yourself thinking about something else, or find yourself at a higher number than ten, start over at one again.

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4) You may add imagery to the counting. Simply make an image of the number you are on. Hold both the sound of counting and the image until the end of the out-breath. As you become more skilled, you may add other helpful images to your practice.

5) You may say silently a word or mantra that has some helpful meaning to you. Say the word as you breathe. The word "calm" may be helpful. Or you may say "in" and "out" as you breathe. You can experiment until you find a helpful word to use.

6) You may pay attention to the feeling of the breath as it passes into and out of the chest area. Such sensation practice helps to improve an important mindfulness skill called interoception. This skill may be helpful once you are well-practiced; interoception allows you to become aware of sometimes subtle sensations in the body that may signal the coming of something dissatisfying in the very near future. With practice, you can use this skill as an early warning signal to mindfully respond to events rather than mindlessly reacting to them.

7) You may also follow the sensation, feel of the breath deep into the body. Pay attention to where your attention goes as you breathe in and out. Sometimes it is helpful to pay attention deep in the hara as the in-breath ends and the out-breath begins. The hara is located 2-3 inches below the navel and a bit into the body.

8) You may also practice sensing the sensation of the body filling on the in-breath and emptying on the out-breath. In and out. In and out. Filling and emptying. Filling and emptying.

9) You may practice by noting the impermanence of the breath. The in-breath ends, and the out-breath ends. You will never have this same breath ever again. It is pure impermanence.

10) Lastly, you may practice remaining in the present moment of the breath as you breathe in and out. The present moment - not the past or the future - is your destination right now. As you stay present, do your best NOT to judge or evaluate anything. Be careful not to enter internal storylines and conversations about life.

Practice and be happy. Breathe in and out. In and out. May you breathe well. May you improve your meditation on the breath. May you eventually become enlightened.

8) Now simply rest with yourself. Hold yourself emotionally in this unconditional love and inner peace.

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