



BODHICHARYA
Awaken the Heart by Opening the Mind

A first practice: meditation – training the mind



Introductory notes

Our minds will naturally find peace, compassion and wisdom if we give them the opportunity. Living with these qualities present leads to a very good life – a content, happy – even an enlightened life. However, due to the way we’ve lived our lives and the mental habits we’ve developed we no longer know how to find this good and pleasant state. So ways of training the ‘heart-mind’ have come into being to help with this – meditation practices.

There are many meditation practices, some come within a religious framework and some do not. Basically though they all fall into one of two types – ‘calm abiding’ and ‘insight’.

‘Calm abiding’ meditation helps you become more at peace and helps you stay in that state even after you’ve finished the practice. It can also help you see your life more clearly - and so give the opportunity to make changes and live life in a better way.

‘Insight’ meditation helps you develop the qualities of calm abiding meditation more deeply - you find yourself becoming more compassionate, and insights into the nature of your life arise more frequently. We come to see ourselves, others and the world about us to be inherently perfect, and we find ourselves living in ways that produce good results for all.

You do not have to believe anything in order to do this practice – except that you can change, can live life in a better way. And you have to want to do that.

Calm abiding - practice guidelines for counting the breath

Meditate in a quiet, well ventilated room. The room should be neither too bright nor too dark. Wear clean clothing that does not restrict your waist or legs. Find the most stable position you can – sitting on either a chair or on a meditation bench. If you are very flexible you can use a meditation cushion sitting in a cross legged position. Sit on the front half of the cushion and, with each meditation period, alternate the leg you place on top. Do not persist in using a meditation cushion if you find the position painful.

The most important thing is to be sitting in an upright position, not resting against anything, and at the same time to be completely relaxed. The stomach in particular should not be held in or constrained.

To centre yourself, sway the body gently from left to right and then backwards and forwards. Allow the natural curves of the spine to form at the neck and in the small of the back. The head should be held upright – the chin should be slightly tucked in. The tongue is held lightly against the back of the top teeth with the lips and teeth closed

The hands are arranged into a kind of circle – put your right hand on your lap and then cover the fingers of the right hand with the fingers of the left-hand. Now bring the two thumbs together to touch in such a way as to make a circular shape. The hands should then be placed gently against the stomach with the thumbs roughly at the height of the naval (an alternative to this is to place the hands separately each one on or near its knee).



Keep the eyes open and lowered, allowing your gaze to fall on the wall or floor in front of you. Keep the eyes gently focused – do not stare. If you wear glasses it's generally best to leave them on.

Now check and make sure that there is no tension anywhere in your body or even in your neck, head or face that you are able to let go of (some tension is so habitual we cant completely let go of it).

For this meditation practice there's no need to try and adjust the depth or speed of your breathing. But, just to start with, take two or three deeper breaths – follow the breath up the back on the inhalation and down the front of the body on the exhalation, thus describing a circle. Then sit steadily with an alert and bright mind.

Now we come to the counting practice: as you exhale the first breath count 'one'. Then inhale. As you exhale the second breath count 'two'. The counting should be continued throughout the whole out-breath. Carry on in this way counting up to 'ten' and then return to 'one' and repeat the sequence. If a thought comes along, finish counting that breath and then return to counting 'one' on the next exhalation.

Meditate regularly, every day if possible, if only for a few minutes. Mornings and evenings or a regular quiet time in your day is best. Decide how long your sessions will be and keep to that as much as you can. Meditating with others in a group is helpful, as is keeping in touch with a teacher.

Best wishes with it all,
Rinchen
monk.rinchen@gmail.com



© www.bodhicharya-kent.org.uk