

Concentrating our hearts and minds

We often experience ourselves as just that, selves plural. Its difficult to make decisions and stay with them. Sometimes we can seem to be just a bundle of conflicting desires. Meditation can help us calm this state of affairs by helping us to become more of an individual. With awareness we can begin to listen to all the conflicting parts of us and in time, if we care to, we can discern our deeper values. Our awareness of these values can allow them to give a clearer sense of direction to our lives, bringing the experience of the satisfaction of living lives that feel more strongly our own.

Meditation helps us to achieve an integrated awareness, which allows our minds and emotions to be in ever deeper harmony. When we concentrate in meditation we need to work gently and firmly to produce greater and greater emotional engagement with the object of our experience. Part of this is process is becoming more and more aware of how we produce our own distraction. If we want to live creatively then we need a greater and greater engagement with our experience..

Usually we can't experience things very fully because we are very caught up in what we want our experience to be like, this can manifest as either craving or aversion. If we can be receptive to what is actually happening even very simple experiences can be richly rewarding. We can learn this directly through the very simple practice of observing our breath.

If we are mindful of our breath, concentrating our minds with an engaged and appropriate awareness, the simple experience of breathing can be an adventure. If we can allow ourselves to find a curious and open awareness of the breath, without controlling it we can experience great riches.

We commence our practice by setting up our posture so that we will be comfortable and alert. Then settling into a broad awareness of our body, emotions and thought, we notice the breath. Notice as much as we possibly can about the breath, its speed, rhythm, temperature, texture or any qualities that we feel it might have for example, vibrancy.

At first the most important part of the practice is to simply reset our attention every time it wanders away from the breath. We create a tread of awareness with the breath. At first there may still be background thoughts or a part of our mind paying attention to external noise. This is normal, we just continue to strengthen and thicken the thread.

The Mindfulness of Breathing

Stage 1

In the first stage we count after each out breath, and at the tenth breath we return to one and repeat our cycle. Our focus is the breath, the counting should be light, just an aid to concentration. If the mind wanders gently but firmly reset your attention on the breath and begin the count at one again.

Stage 2

Secondly we anticipate the breath, counting before each in breath, as before up to ten returning whenever we notice that we have lost our concentration with the breath.

Stage 3

Thirdly we just breath, and focusing on the journey of the breath through the body.

Stage 4

Fourthly we bring our awareness to the first point of contact with the body. This could be the tip of the nose or the top of the lip, it doesn't matter where it is just stay with your perception of this point. The experience becomes more refined like magnifying a picture and becoming aware of greater detail and beauty...like snowflakes, crystals or a single dewdrop on a dew covered tree. As we surrender more to more to the actuality and presentness of our experience the breath becomes like a river we are watching, a river which captures our heart. We become the breath more and more. It flows through us leading us to a world that is brighter clearer and more alive!

We can carry on in this way and if it we feel it appropriate we can let go of the counting altogether, just being luminously aware of the breath. Conclude the practice by just sitting with a broad awareness of yourself, reflecting on any changes in your mental state. Preparing to re-engage mindfully with the next part of your day.