

# Concentration and Mindful Meditation

These 2 types of meditation are at the very core of all meditative practices.

## Concentration Meditation

Concentration meditation builds up mind power.

After practicing concentration meditation, people report they feel calmer, happier, stronger, and more focused.

### Sitting

Concentration meditation is almost always done in a sitting position. It helps to choose a quiet location where you enjoy sitting.

You can sit on a chair. If you want to sit on the floor, you can use a position such as lotus or half-lotus. Or simply lay both calves flat on the floor, one closer to you than the other.

You may need to raise your hips by placing a support or cushion under the buttocks.

Sit with your spine vertical but not tense. The lips can be ever so slightly parted. The tongue rests lightly on the roof of the mouth. Place your left hand, palm up, on your lap. The right hand goes palm up on top of the left. The two thumbs gently touch. Close your eyes.

### Watching the breath

Focus your mind on the physical sensation the breath makes as it enters and leaves the nostrils:

In-breath, out-breath. In-breath, out-breath.

Don't force your breathing. Let it be natural. Just watch.

As soon as you find your attention has drifted away from the breath, notice this has happened, gently return to the breath.

If your mind is very active, you might find it helpful to count the breaths until the mind settles down. Count from one to ten and then stop counting for a while. If you need to, you can come back and count from one to ten again.

Start paying attention to the quality and texture of each breath. Is it long or short? Shallow or deep? Rough or smooth? Each breath has its own shape.

To develop more intense concentration, you can separately pay attention to the beginning, middle and end of each in-breath and each out-breath. Again, whenever you discover your mind has drifted away from the breath, be gentle with yourself. Allow your mind to settle back on to the breath.

Twenty or thirty minutes is a good length of time to begin with.

Concentration meditation gives you mind power. You can use this power to make yourself more effective in everyday life. Or, you can use this raw power for mindfulness meditation.

## Mindfulness Meditation

Mindfulness meditation expands your awareness. You will discover the way you react to things, and gain self-understanding.

To do mindfulness meditation, you allow your sphere of attention to expand to include peripheral phenomena around the breath.

Your focal point remains the in-breath and the out-breath at the nostrils. The difference is that you allow yourself to become aware of whatever else is happening in your mind and body.

### Noticing and naming

The basic practice is "noticing and naming."

Instead of returning immediately to the breath, take a look at what it is that's drawn you away from the breath.

For example, if you hear a sound, make a mental note to yourself, "hearing," and then come back to the breath.

If you remember something; note "remembering."

If you imagine something happening in the future notice; "imagining."

You can, of course, include the body in your mindfulness. For example, when you feel tension or pain in your back, just notice that this is what's happening.

After **noticing** and **naming**, allow your attention to gently settle back on to the breath.

In the beginning it's helpful to use words to describe what you've become aware of. As you become more skilled you can let go of the words. When you hear a sound you simply know that you've heard a sound, and come back to the breath. The change from verbal to non-verbal knowingness takes place in its own time and there's no

need to specifically work on it. If you find it helpful, you can always come back to the verbal naming at any time.

Mindfulness isn't just a practice for formal meditation. It's something to do throughout the day. Mindfulness is a continuous "in the moment" awareness.

When you're walking, know that you're walking. If you're reaching for a cup of green tea, notice and name "reaching." If you catch the fragrance of it, notice the action of smelling. If you taste it in your mouth, notice the action of tasting.

Sitting on your chair or cushion to practice mindfulness meditation is called "formal" practice. The noticing-and-naming throughout the rest of the day is called "informal" practice.

The two are related. Formal practice **builds up a momentum** of mindfulness that carries over into your informal practice.

Concentration meditation and mindfulness meditation are also related. If you can focus strongly on the breath, you'll be more aware of something that has distracted your attention away from the breath. If you can notice with precision what's happening around the breath, it'll be easier for you to come back to the breath.

Because they're so closely related, you can combine concentration meditation and mindfulness meditation in a single sitting. A good strategy is to start with enough concentration meditation to clarify and strengthen your mind, and then allow your field of awareness to expand, so that you transition into mindfulness meditation.

To reach the correct amount of concentration for mindfulness meditation, sit until the mind settles down. It's a bit like watching a lake where sand off the bottom has been stirred up by the wind. After a while the sand settles and you can see clearly into the water.

If your mind becomes too busy during mindfulness meditation, you can come back to concentration meditation for a while. The mind may roam around in past, present and future, but the body and the breath are always here and now.