

Meditate, naturally

Meditation is as natural as our breathing itself. The most basic meditation begins with our breath. It begins with accepting our breath as the most precious thing we have. It has been with us since day one, and has been loyal to us through thick and thin. No matter what happens to us, it is always with us. Our breath is our life itself: what could be more natural than that?

In breath meditation, we simply watch our breath with love and respect, watching it just as it is without any judgement or expectation. We watch it with all our attention, like gazing at a still clear starry night sky. It helps greatly to smile in our hearts at this most basic human act. Just as we learn to breathe, we learn from breathing.

As we attentively smile at the breath, it becomes more peaceful, and smiles back at us, as it were. As our breath relaxes, notice how we feel lighter, both in mass and vision. This is because our blood pressure drops to a comfortably normal level. Our heart-rate too slows down and our mind clears up.

To fully enjoy this beautiful breath, we must free thinking. What we are effectively doing is letting go of words and language, so that we can feel ourselves directly. If we do this well enough, then all we see is light and form; all we hear is sound; all we sense is feeling; all we cognize is thought. This is the real meaning of being “objective.” Everything else is subjective, mind-made.¹

This is as “mental” as we can get as a start to the path of inner peace. Here, “mental” means letting go of the body, that is, all the data-gathering and interpreting in the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the body. We simply let the whole tired body have a well-deserved healing rest.

Even on this mental level, “things” are still happening. We will notice there are still a lot of thoughts. We cannot really clear our mind of all thoughts, not at this stage anyway. These thoughts are the ghosts, echoes and hopes of our being, all that we experienced with our body and mind.

At this more peaceful stage of our meditation, we clearly see our thoughts for what they really are: mercurial and narcissistic. Every one of these thoughts is fighting for our undivided attention. We should accept each of them as they arise, as they are, by gently smiling at them, and letting them be. If we as much as touch or embrace any of them, we are likely to fall back into the physically tiring and confusing spin before we started meditating. So we simply let the thoughts come, let them go.

That’s exactly what meditation is really about: letting go, renunciation. This is the inner renunciation, which we all must go through if we want to be truly happy. We begin by living simply, that is, by letting go of what we do not really need, our excess baggage that slows us down as we journey towards true happiness.

Notice how when we have a lot of things, money, property or power, we often have less quality time with what really matters and makes us happy. The more we have, the less we are likely to need them.

However, if our good karma blesses us with plenty and goodness, then it becomes us to share our blessings with others, especially those with less or none. When such sharing is seasoned with love, it is called generosity and compassion: appreciating the being of others.

Giving empowers others to be happy. When we give happiness, we let others be their true joyful, even creative, self. The more we give, the more happiness we enjoy ourselves. We are the centre of great

¹ This is called **Bāhiya’s teaching**, see **(Arahatta) Bāhiya Sutta** (U 1.10/8), SD 33.7: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/33.7-Bahiya-Ovada-S-u1.10-piya.pdf> & **Mālunkya,putta Sutta** (M 35.95.12/4:73), SD 5.9: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/5.9-Malunkyaputta-S-s35.95-piya.pdf>.

happiness. This is lovingkindness, which is the second kind of meditation which we do with breath meditation.

Some people find it easier to begin meditating with the breath; some with lovingkindness. Often this is due to our personality or to circumstances. If we are by nature introvert or love solitude, we would probably find breath meditation natural and easy. If we are friendly and sociable, we would probably like cultivating lovingkindness. Both meditations are essential to us: breath meditation calms and clears our mind; lovingkindness lightens and brightens our heart. More importantly, the one meditation helps the other, as we are each of a different personality and moods.

Cultivating lovingkindness is a vital meditation because we need to learn to love. Although some of us may be blessed being born to love, most of us face such a slew of slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that we simply do not know how to feel, much less, to love. Hence, we need to learn to love at this very moment: it is never too early, it is never too late to do so. Meditation is a lifelong skill we need to learn and practise. It means accepting ourselves as we are; its purpose: living our lives fully.

Lovingkindness begins with unconditional self-acceptance. We must regularly tell ourselves, “May I be happy,” “No matter what, I’m OK,” “I forgive myself for whatever wrong I’ve done,” “I accept myself just as I am.” It is healing and self-empowering to silently say these words (we can use other positive words, too) especially just before falling asleep. A meditator sleeps happily in this way.

Another important tip at improving our meditation, especially the cultivation of lovingkindness, is to be present whenever we are in a beautiful place or situation. That is why we love fresh, spacious and colourful nature and gardens. They are places for us to be ourselves, to be truly in our element.

We are composed of the four primary elements: earth (hair, skin, flesh, bones), water (blood, sweat, tears, urine), fire (body heat, digestion, decay) and wind (the breath, gases in the body). The garden, and all the grasses, plants, trees, birds, animals and beings, in it, are made of the same four elements. In this sense, we are all one and the same.²

When we feel this connection with everything else, we know that we are not alone. We do not need anything (what we have), but simply to calm our attention (what we are) to be with nature. We need to be fully attentive and enjoy this healing communion. We must remember these happy moments. Otherwise, bad memories and others’ darkness will fill our emptiness.

When we work, our hearts must be in it, so that we enjoy it. Outside of work, we should fill our life’s spaces with joyful memories: re-feel ourselves with happy moments, replay them as if they are happening right here and now, for the first time. Just as sadness is a habit, so too is joy: why not inhabit joy?³

How do we know we are progressing in our meditation? A simple rule of thumb is that we simply feel happy with ourselves. We can enhance this progress in at least three vital ways. Firstly, we should habitually see everything, especially our body, as being impermanent. It is changing all the time. So we need to respect it, keeping it healthy and taking good care of it.

Our mind is even more impermanent, changing faster than lightning speed. So let our views change: views are meant to change. Views are the clothes that our minds wear. We need to change and adapt them according to the season.

² On the 4 elements, see **Mahā Rāhul’ovāda Sutta** (M 62,8-11) & SD 3.11 (4): <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/3.11-Maha-Rahulovada-S-m62-piya.pdf>.

³³ On **how to live the moment fully**, see **Silent sunny spaces**, R285 2013: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/R285-130327-Silent-sunny-spaces-108.pdf>.

Our views are balloons we fill with the air of the past and the future. Let them deflate, let them burst. They have no other use. Only in living in the present do we really see the past and the future for what they are. The bottom line is that we need to unconditionally accept ourselves and others. We are nobody without others: as we see others, so we see ourselves.

We should not make a ritual of breathing and loving. Simply breathe; simply love. We breathe according to our body's needs and reflecting its moods. At the right time, we free our breath from the body and its moods, so that it is fully at peace: this is called breath meditation.

We only know love when we give it away; it can never be taken. If we allow anyone to steal our heart, then we have none left! Only in loving are we loved. This is the essence of lovingkindness meditation. It means unconditional acceptance, without a thought, without any doubt.

True meditation has no name or label: it is simply breathing and loving. These are the two wings on which we fly into the heights of joy and truth, so that we finally become free of all that hold us down in pain and falseness. We simply need to learn to breathe and to love: this is to meditate naturally.⁴

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⁴ On overcoming the 3 fetters (self-identity view, doubt, and attachment to rituals and vows), see **Emotional independence**, SD 40a.8: <http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/40a.8-Emotional-independence.-piya.pdf>.