

Handout #4

Bare Attention Exercise

Composed by Ven. Connie Miller, based on material in *What Is Meditation?*
Buddhism for Everyone, by Rob Nairn, Shambhala Publications, 1999.

Calming the Mind:

Find a quiet place and ensure that you will not be disturbed. Sit on a comfortable seat or cushion with your back straight. Focus your attention on your breathing. Breathe naturally. Use one of the breathing meditations you have learned (counting the breaths, nine-round breathing) to settle the mind and bring it to a state of deeper focus and concentration, ready to engage in meditation.

Motivation:

Create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Think that you are meditating not just for your own individual benefit, but you are taking the time now to meditate and develop your mind to become a wiser and kinder person, able to be of benefit to all beings.

The Main Body of the Meditation:

Start by focusing your attention at the opening of the nostrils. Pay attention to the very subtle sensations as you breathe in and out through your nose. You can feel certain sensations as the air passes, as the small hairs move, cooler sensations as you inhale, warmer as you exhale. Don't follow the air into your body or out into the surrounding environment. Place your attention on the sensations associated with the breath at the opening of your nostrils. Don't follow your breath into your body or outward into the surrounding environment. Think of yourself as a gatekeeper, just watching the breath flow past as it enters and exits the body, keenly observing everything that arises in this area of focus.

In the beginning, if you find it helpful for concentration, you can mentally note "In" and "Out" with each inhalation and exhalation.

Use the breath as an anchor for your attention. If your mind is especially scattered and distracted, place more emphasis in your meditation on the element of concentration, focusing your mind more firmly on your breath.

Distractions are normal. Your attention may be distracted by a thought, or by external sounds or sensations in your body (itching, pain). As soon as you wake up to this and realize that it has happened, simply take note, such as "thinking" or

“sensation”. Don’t get upset or disturbed. Don’t judge. Then very gently disengage from the thought or distraction and return your attention to the breath.

When you gain a deeper level of concentration and focus, loosen your concentration slightly and place greater emphasis on the element of mindfulness in your meditation. Allow your mind to be attentive and observant of whatever comes to notice – regardless of what it is. Don’t identify with the mental elements arising. Simply observe them, like a tourist. Allow them to arise as you observe them, and pass away, without getting involved. Just be aware.

As you gain greater mastery over this kind of meditation, each time the mind wanders from the breath, begin to note specifically how and where it has wandered. To thoughts of the past? To present thinking or fantasizing? To future planning? What kinds of thoughts tend to attract the mind’s attention? What does this indicate about the delusions that play a role in your life?

Do this for ten minutes and then take a short break. Then do one more ten-minute spell and end your meditation session.

Throughout the day, check whether or not you are being mindful – do you always know what you are doing while you are doing it? Meditation is not an isolated activity. It is an integral part of our lives.

Dedication:

Dedicate all the positive energy you have created through the practice of mindful meditation to becoming a better and better person who is more at peace in life and who can bring more peace and well-being to others in every moment of every day.