

Handout #5

Meditation on the Mind Like the Sky

About this meditation:

In our ordinary perceptions, our thoughts and feelings seem to be all there is to our mind – one thought, feeling, image, or idea after another. All these mental contents seem to fill up our minds completely, as if our minds are small, finite containers. But this is an illusion, a misperception on our parts. Our minds are vast and infinite, clear and spacious. Our minds have no boundaries, no limits. When we experience the vast clear spaciousness of our mind, the clarity of our awareness, we begin to see how our thoughts and feelings are like clouds in the sky, simply passing through this vast spacious awareness, not filling it up. Suddenly, we have some space from the endless attachments, aversions, and dissatisfactions of life.



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 practicing Bare Attention. When you gain a deeper level of concentration and focus, loosen your concentration slightly; emphasize the element of mindfulness in your meditation a little more strongly. 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.

Just allow your mindful attention to expand, to encompass your entire sphere of experience, of consciousness. Forget that there is “an observer” and “something being observed.” Simply imagine your experience, your consciousness, as being just like the sky. Completely clear, vast, spacious, without end. Concentrate on this experience. Identify with this experience. Clarity, spaciousness, awareness.

Our minds are completely clear just as the sky is completely clear. The light of the sun shines down on us through the clear sky. Our awareness and wisdom shines through the clarity of our minds. Sometimes clouds fill the sky and obscure the sunshine, but the sky doesn't get upset, the sky doesn't identify with the clouds. The sky doesn't judge. The clouds just pass through the spaciousness of the sky. They come ... and they go. The clarity and spaciousness of the sky isn't compromised by the clouds. They just arise and pass.

Our minds are clear and aware, spacious like the sky. When a thought or an emotion, an idea or an image or a sensation arises in your mind, just observe it. Let it arise and let it pass. Each thought, each mental event ... just like a cloud. Your mind ... the sky. Concentrate on that experience of space and bliss.

Whenever we identify with and are carried away uncontrollably by a thought or a feeling we lose any awareness of the spacious clarity of our mind, of the vast clear and knowing nature of the mind within which each thought or feeling occurs. Our perspective becomes small and constricted. It is as if all there is are clouds; we've lost the sky. We lose that wonderful open spaciousness. When we can simply observe these thoughts and feelings arising without getting involved, when we can identify with the sky instead of with the clouds, then we can reside in that spacious purity of our basic clarity of mind. Calm, clear, peaceful, open spaciousness. Without agitation, without delusions, without anxiety and distress. Without dissatisfaction and attachments and aversions.

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

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.

Colophon:

Composed by Ven. Connie Miller.

Handout #6

Meditation on the Mind Like the Ocean

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 practicing Bare Attention. When you gain a deeper level of concentration and focus, loosen your concentration slightly; emphasize the element of mindfulness in your meditation a little more strongly. 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.

Just allow your mindful attention to expand, to encompass your entire sphere of experience, of consciousness. Forget that there is “an observer” and “something being observed.” Simply imagine your experience, your consciousness as being just like the sky. Completely clear, vast, spacious, without end. Concentrate on this experience. Identify with this experience. Calm clear spacious awareness.

The mind can be likened to an ocean, and the thoughts and other mental events to fish swimming through that clear spacious medium.

We are ordinarily unaware of the nature of the mind and instead observe only the fish-like thoughts. It is as though we are observing an aquarium through a large glass wall and at first only notice the fish. If someone were to tell us to observe the clear water in which the fish were swimming, we might at first have difficulty noticing it because of its transparency. But by simply realizing that the fish could not be swimming unless there was some substance to swim in, we can take our attention away from observing the fish and focus instead on the clear water.

In a similar fashion, we let go of paying attention to our fish-like thoughts; instead, we step back and recognize the clear light nature of our mind within which all our thoughts and other mental events occur. We identify with our minds like an ocean, with that clear spaciousness.

In our ordinary state of mind, as we go about our business every day, having conversations, planning, thinking, worrying, making lists, and so on, it is as if we are living on the surface of that ocean. All those thoughts and feelings and ideas seem to fill our minds, making lots of waves, lots of turbulence and agitation. But as we identify more and more with our ocean-like mind and let go of the wave-like emotions and fish-like thoughts, it is as if we start to descend to the quiet depths of that ocean-like mind. We reach a state of mind that is more peaceful, still, free of agitation and disturbance.

In the case of the aquarium, we will continue to see the fish swimming in front of us as we focus on the water. However, when we focus our attention on the clear light nature of the mind, our thoughts will begin to diminish in intensity and frequency, thereby quieting the mind and enhancing our ability to concentrate.

Whenever we identify with and are carried away uncontrollably by a thought, a feeling, we lose any awareness of the spacious clarity of our mind, of the vast clear and knowing nature of the mind within which each thought or feeling occurs. Our perspective becomes small and constricted. It is as if all there is are the waves; we've lost the ocean. We lose that open and quiet spaciousness. When we can simply observe these thoughts and feelings arising without getting involved, when we can identify with the ocean instead of the fish and the waves, then we can reside in that spacious purity of our basic clarity of mind. Calm, clear, peaceful, open spaciousness. Without agitation, without delusions, without anxiety and distress. Without dissatisfaction and attachments and aversions.

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.

Colophon:

Composed by Ven. Connie Miller.

Handout #7

The Nine-Round Breathing Meditation

About the nine-round breathing meditation:

The nine-round breathing exercise comes from the more esoteric collection of meditation practices contained in tantra. It is a simple but profound method to clear up the energy channels in the body and thus make the mind more serviceable for meditation. In tantra, it is explained that there are subtle energies in the body known as “winds.” The mind is said to accompany these winds, like a rider on a horse. If the winds are serviceable, the mind is serviceable. Nine-round breathing is a way to bring balance to these winds in the body and thus balance to the mind. For us, it is a method to bring the mind to “neutral” in order to generate a positive motivation for the meditation. Other methods to do this are things like counting the breaths from 1 to 10, or 1 to 21, or just focusing on the breath without counting. This is why breathing meditations like this one can be helpful to practice at the start of one’s meditation session.

Nine-round breathing is one of the particular methods that Lama Yeshe taught to his students to help prepare the mind for an effective meditation. So, it is a practice that was given with the blessings of our teachers and can be used from the beginning stages of meditation all the way through the advanced practices of highest yoga tantra.

Kendall Magnussen



Calming the mind:

Focus your attention on your breathing. Use the technique of counting the breaths 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:

(Variation 1):

This is a very helpful technique for relaxing the body and mind before developing meditative concentration on any topic.

Begin by visualizing the three psychic channels, or tubes, within your body through which the wind energy moves. The channels are round and hollow, the size of a straw, and very

fine, smooth, flexible, and luminous. The central channel is blue. It starts at a point midway between the eyebrows, curves up and back along the inside of the skull, like the handle of an umbrella, and then down along the inside of the spine to a point four finger widths below the navel. The right channel is red and runs from the right nostril back and then downward along the right side of the central channel to end at the point four finger widths below the navel. The left channel is white and also runs from the left nostril down along the left side of the spine to also end four finger widths below the navel. For this meditation, imagine that the ends of the three channels join together at this point four finger widths below the navel. Focus for a moment on this visualization.

Now, holding the left nostril closed with an index finger, inhale slowly and fully through the right nostril. Imagine that you are sending the breath all the way down to the end of the right channel. Imagine that the breath flows from the right into the left channel as you move your index finger to hold the right nostril closed. Now exhale slowly and fully through the left nostril. As the breath leaves the left nostril, imagine that all impurities (such as distraction and mental dullness) are expelled with the breath.

Repeat two more times (three breaths in all), inhaling through the right nostril and exhaling through the left and imagining the impurities being expelled with each out-breath.

Now reverse the process. Holding the right nostril closed with your index finger, breathe in deeply through the left nostril, sending the breath all the way down to the end of the left channel. As the breath moves into the right channel, move your index finger to hold the left nostril closed. Exhale slowly and fully through the right nostril. As the breath leaves the right nostril, imagine that all impurities are expelled with the breath.

Repeat two more times (three breaths in all), inhaling through the left nostril and exhaling through the right.

Now inhale slowly and deeply through both nostrils, sending the air down through the right and left channels. As you exhale, imagine that the breath is expelled up and out through the central channel. As you breathe out, imagine that you are expelling all impurities out through the point between the two brows. Repeat two more times (three breaths in all).

Now imagine that the three channels are completely clean and luminous.

If at the end of these nine rounds, you find that the mind is still scattered and distracted, repeat the nine rounds again. Once you have completed as many sets as you intend to do, then spend a few moments just breathing gently and evenly, imagining your breath flowing freely through the inner channels of your body.

Dedication:

Finally, dedicate your positive energy and insights to the well-being and happiness of all living beings.

(Variation 2):

In this variation, conjoin the above meditation with the visualization of white light and black smoke. For each of the nine rounds, as you inhale, imagine that you are inhaling purifying white light. The light descends through the channel (right, left, or both, depending on where you are in the meditation), pushing all the impurities of body and mind through and cleansing the channel. As you exhale, imagine that all those impurities, in the form of black smoke, are pushed upward and out of each channel and exhaled into space, where they completely disappear. Imagine the white light and black smoke with each of the nine rounds, purifying your body and mind with each breath.

Colophon:

Composed by Ven. Connie Miller.