



Mindfulness of Breathing

The Heart of Awareness (HOA) is an ecumenical Buddhist Sangha that incorporates members from many different lineages. Anyone from any tradition is welcome to sit with us in stillness using any technique that you have been taught. These instructions are not meant to endorse any form of meditation as being the only “proper” one but are given as a basic reference, that might be particularly useful to someone who doesn’t have current meditation practice. Such meditation is known as shamatha (Sanskrit) or peaceful abiding – the ground practice in Buddhist training for more than 2,500 years.

Guidelines for Meditation:

- Take a position in which your spine is erect, balanced but relaxed. Arms, shoulders, face, jaw relax, too.
- If you are sitting in a chair have your feet flat on the floor and your hands relaxed in your lap or resting gently on your thighs.
- Eyes are half closed, with a natural soft gaze resting slightly downward 4–6 feet in front. Eyes closed if that is your prior instruction.
- Become aware of your body sitting – your buttocks on the chair or cushion. Feel the heaviness or lightness of your body. Notice the different contact points. . . feet on the floor, hands in your lap, etc. Bring attention to any areas of tension or distraction and make gentle contact with them, shifting slightly or changing posture at any point to bring relief.
- Make no effort to eliminate or block external sensations – they are natural, too – just flowing through. Notice the energetic quality of the body in the moment and simply take an accepting breath. Bring your gentle attention/awareness to the natural flow of breathing with light emphasis on the out-breath, experiencing it as a feeling of letting go and opening up to space until it dissolves into the room or environment. The inbreath is treated as a natural gap where you simply rest in space before the next outbreath begins. If you’ve been instructed to follow both in and out breath stay with both and the gap between. You may feel the movement of the breath at the point that is most noticeable; either the rise and fall of your abdomen, or the air flow at your nostrils.
- In either case, the mind will wander off, but when you realize you have drifted into thoughts, daydreams or future/past stories, pleasant or unpleasant, silently and gently label it ‘thinking’ and return without judgement to the present moment. Just a sensation of breathing with unconditional friendliness. There is no good or bad meditation session.

Walking Meditation (Meditation in Motion)

Walking meditation is often described as meditation in motion. It is a transitional practice that teaches us the skill of remaining steady and aware in motion, and makes that transition from sitting practice to everyday life. In this practice, you place your full attention on the process of walking – from the shifting of the weight in your body to the mechanics of placing your foot. During walking meditation, we train ourselves to remain present and mindful even while moving, which is usually when we're keen on action. As with all forms of meditation, maintaining awareness is key. Whatever else captures your attention, come back to the sensation of walking.

The physical directions are simple. At the beginning of walking meditation, stand for a moment, attentively, settling into a dignified position. Your arms can be held in any way that is comfortable, but it is recommended that you find a consistent, steady form. In some traditions it is taught to lightly hold your hands at the level of the belly, in a gesture with the left hand lightly closed with the right hand softly covering it. Then, while breathing in, lift the heel of one foot. While breathing out, carry forward and rest that foot on the floor, with a sense of heel, sole, then toes, as the other foot naturally begins to rise. Walk very slowly with a continuous repetition of lifting, swinging and placing the foot. When beginning amidst periods of sitting, attend carefully to the transition from sitting to walking and when it is time to sit again, pause for a moment before sitting down. This is helpful in establishing and supporting continuous mindfulness.

Keep your head up and your neck relaxed. Keep your eyes open to maintain balance, but with a soft gaze, not looking at anything in particular. Walk naturally. Maintain the slowest pace that is comfortable and pay minimal attention to your surroundings. Watch for any tensions building up in the body and release them as soon as you notice them. Don't make any attempt to be graceful or to look pretty. This is not an athletic exercise or dance but an exercise in awareness. Your objective is to maintain alertness, heightened sensitivity and a full, unimpeded experience of the motion of walking. Put your attention on the sensations coming from the feet and legs as you move through space. Don't endeavor to watch yourself intensely nor to wander in daydream. Just stay connected to the sensation of walking, feeling your muscles in movement and noting tactile sensations as the feet press against the floor, and then lift again. You may settle into a fluid, smooth motion as each foot goes through a lift, a swing, and then a down tread. Each step has a beginning, middle and end.

You are not likely to maintain this unbroken awareness of motion. Your mind may wander. When you notice the distraction of thoughts, as in sitting meditation, return in this case bringing your attention back to walking. As best possible, don't think, just feel, lightly registering simple sensations as they flow.

A learning period is natural. Whatever arises, just note that, and let it go. By attending to this practice with the discipline of 'not too tight, not too loose' we can let go of grasping for perfection or freezing the activity into concepts. There is no need to maintain our sense of myself 'doing' this. There is only the sweep of tactile and bodily sensation, learning to stay steady amidst whatever physical or mental tendencies arise, returning back again and again to the reality of a human moving simply through space in awareness.