



## Mindfulness Meditation

Meditation awakens in us an unchanging pure awareness which underlies the whole of life.

The practice of mindfulness begins with sitting, alone or in a group, for a certain period of time each day. Sitting practice is often easier to do at first with the support of a group. Make a commitment to practice meditation for a specific period of time, perhaps twenty to thirty minutes, to allow your mind to settle. The following instruction is based on the mindfulness-awareness (*shamatha-vipashyana*) form of meditation.

1. **The “posture”** is a touchstone to the present moment. Sit upright with legs crossed (or sit in a chair), hands resting palms down on your thighs, mouth slightly open, eyes open with gaze slightly downward. Senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, sensation) are open, relaxed, and receptive to the experience of the moment. Let your body relax while keeping your spine long and your belly soft.
2. **The “breath”** is the other touchstone to the present moment. Bring awareness to your breath. Gently rest your awareness on your out breath, letting your awareness go out with it. At the end of the breath, notice the gap before the breath goes out again – there is a sense of just opening and waiting.
3. **Labeling thoughts** – when you notice your attention has been carried away by a thought or emotion, and you are forgetting to be present with your breath, label the thought “thinking” and return your attention to your breath and the “posture”. Whatever the thoughts are, label it all “thinking” without judgment or harshness. Use the labeling as an opportunity to develop honesty, gentleness, and compassion for yourself. Each time you return your attention to the breath and sensations, regard it as a fresh start.
4. **Touch & go** – Touch the outgoing breath with your awareness, and then simply let go. *Touching* means to fully experience each thought, emotion, perception, or sensation and enter fully into life, however difficult it may be at that moment. *Letting go* means not holding on to your experience as it continually changes. The touch of awareness on the breath is light – only about 25 percent of the awareness is on the breath. The rest of your awareness rests gently with your inner and outer experience.
5. **Calmly abiding in the moment** – Allow an inner smile, appreciating this moment of touching life as it is. Fearlessly observe whatever comes up in your mind and heart, then gently and softly touch it and let it go. The evenness toward all thoughts, desires, emotions, and distractions cultivates gentleness, compassion, and equanimity for yourself, and others.

(Inspiration from *Sacred World: A Guide to Shambhala Warriorship in Daily Life*, by Jeremy Hayward, and *Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living*, by Pema Chödrön.)