

## Simple Breathing Exercise to Start Your Meditation Practice

*The following breathing techniques are commonly done at the start of meditation sessions within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Whether or not you are a Buddhist and whether or not you have any connection to Tibetan Buddhism, these breathing exercises are safe and applicable to practice on their own. These exercises are meant to help create a nice delineation between normal life and the start of a meditation session. Like Pranayama (which is one of the eight limbs of Indian yoga), these breathing exercises also help to clear the lungs of any stagnant air so that our breath and minds can be as fresh and relaxed as possible.*

*Start with assuming a comfortable, upright, seated position. The ideal posture is described as follows: 1) Legs: crossed (cushions under your bum are fine); 2) Hands: resting in the lap or on the knees; 3) Spine: straight; 4) Shoulders: spread (heart open); 5) Head and Neck: chin slightly lowered; 6) Mouth: tip of the tongue lightly resting on the palate (top of mouth); 7) Eyes: gazing past the tip of the nose (or closed).*

- Start by breathing in through both nostrils, filling your lungs completely.
- Close your left nostril with the pad of your left middle finger and empty your lungs by breathing out strongly through your right nostril. Make sure to get all the air out.
  - As you breathe out, imagine all your anger and frustration is expelled from your body in the form of dirty, polluted smoke.
  - Then breathe in through just your right nostril. As you breathe in, imagine that all the wisdom and compassion of the world dissolves into you in the form of white light. After completing a full inhalation through your right nostril, release your left nostril.
- Close your right nostril with the pad of your right middle finger and empty your lungs by breathing out strongly through your left nostril. Make sure to get all the air out.
  - As you breathe out, imagine all your attachments, desire and obsessive thinking is expelled from your body in the form of dark red light.
  - Then breathe in through your left nostril. As you breathe in, imagine all the wisdom and compassion of the world dissolves into you in the form of white light. After completing a full inhalation through your left nostril, release your right nostril.
- Leaving both nostrils open, breathe in completely and fully then breathe out strongly through both nostrils.
  - As you breathe out, imagine any ignorance you may have billowing out in a dark cloud.
  - Then breathe in completely and fully again. As you breathe in, imagine that all the wisdom and compassion of the world dissolves into you in the form of white light.

*Do not worry too much about the details of these simple visualizations, just consider whatever you visualize as actually happening. Try not to dwell on any one part of the visualization and try not to ask questions about them, for example, how bright should the white light be? If you prefer or if it is easier for you, concentrate only on the inhalation and exhalation without visualizing anything. It is up to you.*

- Once you have completed the breathing exercises, breathe normally and start your meditation practice. At this point let the entire forced breathing thing go completely.

*At the end of your meditation session, take a moment to acknowledge that the session is over. If you like, you can dedicate whatever benefit you have derived from the session to whomever or whatever you like.*