

Guided Meditation on the Breath

1. Assume a comfortable meditation posture, spine erect but not stiff, leaning forward just a little, feet on the floor shoulder width apart, shoulders relaxed, shoulder blades relaxed down your back, head and neck lifted as though being drawn up by a thread connected to the top of your head, chin tucked.

2. Now close your eyes and turn your attention away from the outer world with all its busyness and demands and begin to notice what is there. You might become conscious of the weight of your body against the chair or the floor and the feeling of your clothing against your skin. Now feel the cool brush of air against your face and hands.

3. Now gently bring your awareness to the breath, this life sustaining activity that for the most part goes without us giving it any thought whatsoever. In reality, it is not so much that you are breathing as you are being breathed. It just happens, this inhalation, lowering of the diaphragm and lifting of the chest, and exhalation, returning the diaphragm and chest to relax back into their positions of rest. It's a miraculous and very intimate process really, taking this vital life sustaining substance into our bodies and returning it back to the out world, having taken in what we need and returning out what is not useful to us. In this process, we are dependent on the generosity of the plant kingdom, which uses what it needs from the air, giving off oxygen, the substance we animals require. We breathe the air in, take what we need, and give back carbon dioxide, which is what sustains the plants. This web of interdependence is so beautiful when you think about it.

4. Continue to breathe normally, paying attention to the inhalation, the slight coolness of the breath as it enters the nostrils. The feel of air as it travels down your windpipe into the lungs. There is an ever-so-slight pause at the end of the inhalation before there is the movement to exhale. See if you can notice that, then follow the breath as it comes from the lungs back up the windpipe and out the nostrils, slightly warmer than when it entered the body. Again, at the end of the exhalation, there is an infinitesimal pause before the impulse to inhale again. These pauses between the inhalation and the exhalation have a name, the *madya*, and they are doorways into deeper aspects of ourselves.

5. Now take three or four deep, slow breaths, drawing in as much air as you can and extending the belly. Imagine yourself breathing in relaxation. Now exhale slowly and completely allow as much air as possible to be released back into the ocean of air around you. As you do, imagine yourself letting go of tension, fear and concerns. Repeat this, deeply breathing in relaxation and breathing out any worries or concerns.

6. Return to normal breathing.

7. When you are ready gently bring your awareness back to the room and open your eyes.