

Mindfulness of Breathing Long and Deep

Begin by inviting your body to be as comfortable and relaxed as possible, without losing your sense of alignment and openness. Whether sitting on a cushion, bench, or chair, ensure your body is supported in the posture you have chosen.

To help yourself fully arrive, gently sense your attention expanding through the whole body. If you find any areas of tension, invite them to relax as much as feels possible. Especially pay attention to any tightness or holding in the area around the eyes, the jaw, the shoulders, the belly. Let the out breath relax, and the in breath welcome these areas of tension. If possible don't make a problem out of sensations, instead develop a more intimate connection with bodily life, allowing whatever tension remains to be there. With a sense now of the whole body, tune into the breath. Invite your attention to ride with the breath in and out of your body, like a surfer on a wave or a boat on a swell. If this is pleasant, do enjoy it, meditation doesn't need to be a struggle. You might sense the breath being invited even deeper into the body—right down to the belly, or even deeper than that.

If the mind wanders, which it will from time to time, return to the deeper breathing. Don't rush back to the breath: take time to relax the face, shoulders and belly first. This training is simple, but not necessarily easy. It is natural, and expected, that we will get lost, the most important thing is how we respond when we 'find' ourselves again.

Sometimes it may also be helpful to gently note where your mind went. Mentally note with one word the flavour or intention of the thinking; 'planning', 'fantasy', 'memory'... But resist the temptation to work far back in time, or understand all the nuances of the train of thought. This much investigation will usually lead to a spiral of thinking, unless the whole being is already very calm.

Keep bringing your attention into the more pleasant experience of breathing long and deep. Don't strain to bring the breath long, rather invite it to be deep. We don't need to move more air, breathing more slowly, might be a better way to describe this practice.

If helpful, challenge the attention to intimately follow the breath for 3 whole breaths, then relax, and repeat. Connect to the rhythm and the movement of breathing as it happens. Let the quality of your attention be light and relaxed, allow the experience to be guided gently deeper and fuller.

In general, see if we can open up to the breath on an energetic level rather than as an anatomical, rational, scientific fact. Attend to this breath energy in a way that supports its flow throughout the body. We may notice a feeling of blockage or holding where the breath doesn't reach, or feels numb? Occasionally see if you can gently invite the longer breath into these areas as well.