

Seven Factors of Enlightenment - Concentration Part 2

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So one of the very, really important supports for concentration practice is your own body. People often associate concentration with something mental, mental focus. But in Buddhist concentration practice, the body is a really important support, aid, foundation for concentration practice. So it would be useful here as we begin that you take a posture, take some very consciously.

And even if you're comfortable and familiar with the meditation posture for a long time, kind of take your posture kind of freshly and maybe even sway back and forth, side to side, forward and backwards a little bit. And really kind of begin to feel your body from the inside. Perhaps close your eyes. And then consciously and carefully kind of align your body well so you feel like there's stability. Perhaps feeling the contact of your body against the chair or the floor. Feel that contact as if it's a base that supports you.

And feeling the weight of your body through your body. In particular, notice how the weight of your body moves through your spine. Is the center of gravity of your bodily weight, does it travel through your spine or is it in front of your spine? Behind the center line of your spine. And perhaps you can move forward and backward a little bit, gentle movements. Moving slowly up the spine.

It's the best possible way. Most of the weight of your body feels like it's stacked or moves through the vertebrae. The spine and the muscles along the spine and the muscles between the spine and down into your hips are what hold you up. And then around that structure we want to see if we can relax as much of the body that's not needed for holding us upright. For this purpose it might be useful to take a few long slow deep breaths. And as you exhale, see if you can relax and soften.

Anything extra, any extra holding in your body. Breathing in deeply and softening the area of your shoulders and shoulder blades. And perhaps it's possible to soften the belly. Perhaps it's possible to soften the muscles of your thighs and legs. Some people brace themselves against life. Perhaps it's possible to relax all the muscles in your pelvic cavity.

So there's a letting go, sinking into your chair or your cushion. And it can be helpful to also

soften the muscles of the face and jaws. You might even drop your mouth open and then let your jaws gently float back together. And then, sitting here quietly, turn your attention inward to the quality of whatever your inner life feels like in your body, in your heart. Become aware of your inner feelings, your inner emotion, life, in a very simple way. Not to analyze it or to say, "Is it comfortable or uncomfortable inside?"

Does your mental or emotional or heartfelt life feel agitated or relaxed, contracted or open? So then... Letting yourself be at ease. Trying to cultivate some ease. Easy feeling, easiness. Being easy with how you're feeling right now.

And then within your body, as part of your bodily experience, become aware of breathing, of how your body experiences breathing. And familiarize yourself with what the experience of breathing is like for you, here and now, as if it's completely new. Snowflakes. No two breaths are the same. And is the experience of breathing in some global way, global experience of breathing, is it more on the comfortable side or more on the uncomfortable side? If it's more in the comfortable way of breathing, kind of settle into that comfortableness of breathing.

If it's more uncomfortable, settle into the sense of discomfort. Just feel the uncomfortable-ness in a very relaxed way. It's okay. Make space for it so that perhaps something in the breathing can relax. As we hold it gently and openly, acceptingly. And then as you feel your breathing, see if you can find some particular area of breathing feels compelling or comfortable to center your attention on.

Could be the movement of the belly, solar plexus area or the chest, center of the chest. Could be the air as it goes in and out through the nostrils. And then perhaps you can center yourself on that place of breathing, as if awareness, as if attention, concentration, is a large round sponge. At the center of the sponge, there is this place of breathing. And as you breathe in and breathe out, that experience of breathing gets absorbed into the sponge of awareness. The very center of the awareness, centered in the great bubble of awareness is this place of the breathing.

Letting that be the center of gravity of attention. Thank you. So we're engaged in a training to develop the capacity to stay centered, stay focused on the experience of breathing. And that you're responsible for that training. And it involves being intent, an intention. This is what you're up to right now.

And then whenever the mind wanders off in other directions, you remind it gently, but maybe firmly, or softly, come back to the breathing. Direct everything back to the breathing. I'm

sorry. Thank you. When the mind wanders off in thought, let go of what you're thinking about. Let go of focusing on that.

And redirect the attention back to the breath. Center yourself on the experience of breathing. And if there are feelings, emotions, sensations that are also attracting your attention, can make it difficult to be with your breathing, that the experience of breathing is at the very center, the heart of your whole lived experience now. And that everything else is on the periphery. You don't have to engage or change or react to how you're feeling. Come back and let the experience of breathing, let the breathing be at the center of it all.

Hanging out with the rhythm, breathing in and breathing out. *door slams* Don't be troubled by anything. Let everything be about breathing as much as you can. Think breathing. Think breath. Breath.

Let your thinking be about settling into the experience of breathing. Breathing. Thank you. And then monitor a little bit how it's going for you. How well are you able to stay focused on the breathing? What are some of the things that are making it maybe a challenge?

And as you monitor yourself gently, see if what is needed is maybe more firmness or intentness, energy to really apply yourself, or if what's needed is to relax something, to soften, soften into, be more accepting. What helps you stay more focused on the breathing? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. To become more intimate with breathing, perhaps at the end of the exhale, there can be a gentle letting go or relaxing, softening of the exhale, so that your exhale is a little bit longer.

And go into a longer exhale. Or if you find yourself sleepy, perhaps you can breathe in, at the top of the in-breath, breathe in a little bit more extra, more actively, to bring some more energy. And in the last couple of minutes of the sitting, see if you can let your mind become as quiet as possible so that it's increasingly sensitive to the experience of breathing. Kind of like you're letting your mind come real quiet so you can hear a sound far in the distance or tune into something that's very subtle. Let your mind become as still as possible to feel the subtlety, the fullness of breathing in, breathing out. So let's take a 25-minute period for walking meditation.

And I'd like to teach you a way to do walking meditation that's more concentration-focused. And that is, find a walkway, some place to walk where it may be 20 or 30 feet long. And walk probably in a pace that's slower than a normal walking pace. And focus your attention on the sensations in the feet as you walk, especially in the foot that's doing the stepping. And then

you're going to really kind of tune into that. Let that be the center of attention, the center of gravity of what goes on.

If you have to think at all, think about your feet. Think about being present for your feet. Encourage yourself, nudge yourself to stay there. And then as you count, as you walk, count your steps. And each step gets one count. And so count five steps.

One, two, three, four, five. When you get to five, start again at one for the next five steps. Count again, start over again. The next time count to six. So there's six steps. One, two, three, four, five, six.

When we get, next time count to seven. Next time to six. Next time to five. When you get to five again, then next time go to six and seven. And go up and down. If you lose count, don't worry.

If you lose count, you just get to start from the very beginning of it all over again. One to five again. And just don't worry how often you lose count. Just kind of come back and start again. One to five. And this counting of the rest, keeping your attention focused on the feet as you step.

You're really kind of staying there. And by counting, it really can support being focused and concentrated. And sometimes it's helpful that when you make the count that you don't just do a brief little kind of checklist, you know, one, done with that. But you really let that inner word, inner language that says one, really kind of become, kind of fill the thinking mind. So like one. So like soft but full and gentle.

Kind of like, you know, you're in a dark room and someone opens the windows and the sunlight fills the room. So you're one and that one just kind of fills the thinking mind. So that's not a lot of space in there for a lot of thinking about other things. You have to keep track of where you are. You have to have that keeping track, remembering where you are on the count to help support the concentration. Does that make sense?

So we'll start again in here at five minutes after ten. And are you managing? So Andrea will ring a bell at ten o'clock, and that gives you five minutes to come back, and we'll continue here. What? Oh, eleven, yes. So five minutes after, sorry again, five minutes after 11, and Andre will ring the bell at 10 so you know to come back if you don't look at your watch a lot.

And now when you do walking outside, you can walk on our gravel and sidewalks and our

parking lot, but please do not do walking meditation in the dentist parking lot. Also, please, if you're walking on the sidewalk, be aware of other people who are walking by or cars going in driveways. You should really give them right away. Speed up, get out of the way. Don't kind of hold your, you know...