

❁ Helping Meditators To Meditate ❁

Meditation uses tools of mental cultivation to develop insight and tranquility, and to access and explore the cosmic truths within you. The Buddha said, "I will show you the rising and the passing of the universe in this fathom-long body". He was talking about each of us.

Meditation is a skill that can be learned, but it progresses more easily when the conditions that support meditation are optimized. Following are some of the traditional guidelines that have proven, over many centuries, to help stabilize and enhance meditation processes.

- ▶ The ideal meditation environment is quiet, peaceful, and has good air. If this isn't possible at home, then scout out alternative locations such as churches, chapels, temples, shrines, community centres, yoga studios, and parks (when weather permits).
- ▶ It can be helpful to set a schedule to meditate in the same place and at the same times each day. Let family and friends know you will be unavailable at those times, except for a genuine emergency.
- ▶ To assist your tranquility, concentration, and focus while meditating, turn off the phone, computer, music player, TV, radio and other sources of external distraction. Try soft ear plugs if too much uncontrollable external noise is disrupting your meditation.

❁ **Analysis during Meditation**: An important part of Insight meditations is to continually monitor, identify, and mentally label your reactions to internal and external arisings during meditation. Ongoing meditation analysis helps develop detachment and hones the ability to recognize the deeper underlying factors which fuel attachment, aversion, delusion, discomfort, and unhappiness.

❁ **Analysis in the Moment during Meditation**: When anything arises in the mind, silently label it as "Pleasant" or "Unpleasant". Then immediately return your attention to the focus of your meditation.

❁ **Attention and Concentration**: Almost every form of meditation requires a continuity of attention. Concentration is both continuity of attention and persistence of focus and applies particularly when your meditation is on a specific object, such as your breath, a mandala, a mantra, etcetera. Whenever your attention drifts while meditating, simply acknowledge the fact and bring your attention back to your meditation. For persistent problems in maintaining attention and concentration, see "Trouble-Shooting" (pages 4 & 5).

❁ **Attitude**: For your meditation exercises to be effective, you need to steer your mind in a wholesome, balanced way — neither too harsh nor too lax. Persistence and diligence is needed to make progress, but don't "beat yourself up" if your mind "misbehaves". Just notice what deflected your attention and then refocus on the meditation. The goal is to reduce ignorance and suffering, so it doesn't help to punish yourself if a meditation is not going exactly as wished. For persistent problems, see "Trouble-Shooting" (pages 4 & 5).

❁ **Contact Point**: If a contact point in your body is an object of meditation, find that contact point and push your mind's attention into it, like shooting an arrow into a target. You will be aware of other movements and sensations in your body, but keep your attention on the contact point. In a similar way, when cutting bread, you are aware of the movement of your arm, but your attention is focused on the point where the edge of the blade connects with the bread.

☸ **Counting to Help Focus:** To help focus on the movement of your breath, such as during Anapana-sati, or to help restore attention and concentration during any meditation, take intervals to silently count each pair of in-and-out breathes, mentally saying:

"in 1"---"out 1" "in 2"---"out 2" going up to "in 10"---"out 10"

Then count backwards with your breath: "in 9"---"out 9" to "in 1"---"out 1"

Repeat the 10-count of in and out breaths forward and backward for as long as is helpful.

☸ **Duration of Meditation Sessions:** Long meditation sessions are productive only when a meditator has developed appropriate levels of concentration, mental equilibrium, and physical stamina. Short episodes of meditation (i.e. 10, 15, or 20 minutes) done at intervals in the day can often be more effective for many meditators.

☸ **Eyes Open or Closed:** Closed eyes are a natural prelude to sleeping and dreaming, which can make it difficult for some people to maintain concentration on their meditation.

Many people meditate better with their eyes open, and meditation energy is usually higher when the eyes are open. With practice you can learn to relax your open eyes so they do not focus on distracting visual details when you are meditating.

In walking meditations, your gaze rests loosely on the ground approximately five to ten feet in front of you.

When sitting, standing, or reclining, your eyes rest, unfocused, and loosely fixed in space in front of you and angled slightly down. It may help to place a small neutral item, such as a smooth pebble, in the appropriate location to rest the eyes on, without focusing on it.

If you're being distracted by what you see around you when meditating, then alternate intervals of eyes open with intervals of eyes closed.

Lama Lodro says that half of his greatest meditation teachers said you cannot meditate with your eyes closed – and the other half said exactly the opposite.

Everyone has to experiment with eyes open and closed when meditating and find out for themselves what works best for them.

☸ **Food:** Avoid eating too much food prior to sitting, standing, or reclining meditations. Even a bit too much food causes dullness when meditating. A heavy meal before a settled meditation session can cause sluggishness, torpor, discomfort, and interfere with the meditation process.

Providing an hour's interval after eating before meditating will reduce sluggishness and torpor. Walking meditations, however, can be done (within sensible parameters) shortly after a meal. Do not fast during meditation work, unless directed to do so by a qualified meditation teacher.

☸ **Posture:** Establish an effective, stable, and comfortable posture for meditation that provides for mental alertness and is not a continual physical distraction. Four different postures can be used for most meditation exercises:

Sitting (on a mat or a chair)

Standing

Walking

Reclining (but not so comfortably that it causes sleepiness)

Posture / continued Page 3

Posture / *continued from Page 2 :*

It can be helpful to alternate through different body postures during most meditation sessions. In all meditation postures, even when reclining, your back should be kept straight, according to the natural alignment of a healthy spine (not flat as a ruler).

When sitting on a chair, the chair needs to be stable and secure. Your feet should be flat on the ground without strain and without restricting circulation in your legs. Your back can rest against a support, but at the same time keep your back upright and straight.

Walking postures, in particular, can greatly enhance and stabilize many forms of meditation. (See Lama Lodro's "Walking Meditations" handout for details on walking postures and meditations: www.lamalodro.ca/lodro-meditate.html#tools.)

❁ **Review:** This is an extremely important part of mental cultivation and is a very valuable conclusion to a meditation exercise. The review is a retrospective summation of what you noticed during the meditation session. It can range from a simple summary to an in-depth analysis, depending on the capacity of the meditator. The review can be done as a mental exercise, but if the details are difficult to sort out, then it can be helpful to write them down after the meditation. A Check List (below) was developed in Buddhist monasteries to help.

❁ **Review Check List:** Buddhist monasteries developed a check list for meditation reviews. In the Theravada tradition, the students write out the results of the check list before a meditation interview to provide to the teacher during the meditation interview. The check list moves through four aspects of increasing subtlety, starting with the easiest aspect, "Body", and progressing to the most subtle aspect, "Phenomena":

Body: What happened in the body during the meditation? Relaxation? Pain? Itches? Twitches? Cramps? Spasms? Warmth? Heat? Cold? Numbness? Streamings? etcetera.

Feelings: Were there Good feelings? Bad feelings?

Mind States: Were there experiences of Bliss? Calm? Dullness? Anger? Heaviness? Restlessness? Worry? Jealousy? Envy? etcetera.

Phenomena: Were there Mystical Signs? Symbols? Insights? Visions?

❁ **Sharing of Merit:** Meditation sessions can generate spiritual merit, which has healing power and helps purify karma. At the end of each meditation, the merit you gained can be shared with all beings in general, or with specific beings you know are ill or suffering. Sharing of merit can be expressed and focused with simple affirmations, such as these:

"I dedicate all virtue and merit gained from this strengthening activity to the awakening of all beings."

"May all beings be well and happy and guide themselves to liberation."

"May {name of specific person} be free from sickness, free from harmful spirits, free from obstacles, free from dangers, and free from suffering."

☸ **Temperature of Room:** Keeping the head slightly cool helps a meditator to stay awake and maintain alertness and clarity. The rest of the body should be at a comfortable but moderate temperature – not so warm as to cause sleepiness and torpor, nor so cold as to cause distraction and sluggishness.

☸ **Trouble-shooting** re: [Some Causes of Boredom, Restlessness, Sleepiness](#)

If you are having problems with your meditations, you need to identify what is causing the problem and take appropriate action to remedy it.

A few suggestions follow about some common causes, with some traditional advice, re: what to do about boredom, restlessness, and sleepiness when meditating.

NOTE : These are very general recommendations. For issues or problems not listed here, you are advised to consult a qualified meditation teacher and/or an appropriate health consultant.

Some General Recommendations If You are BORED when Meditating:

- ▶ try meditating for shorter, and possibly more frequent, intervals.
- ▶ try the “Energy Walk” before meditating, or do your meditation while walking (see “Walking Meditations” at www.lamalodro.ca/lodro-meditate.html#tools).
- ▶ alternate between different types of meditation and different meditation activities; for example: breathing meditations, insight meditations, absorption meditations, mantras, mudras, kasinas, mandalas, visualizations, Wongkurs, Tantric deity motifs, etcetera.
- ▶ enliven your meditations with a related field of study that expands, deepens, and supports your meditation. For example, if you are doing meditation exercises on Medicine Buddha or White Tara of Long Life, then the study of anatomy, physiology, nutrition, and energy healing can provide mental stimulation and will enhance those meditations.
- ▶ being bored with yourself and your life can produce boring meditations, so it can be helpful to you and your meditations to try an interesting new hobby, or learn a new skill, or study an intriguing new subject. It is helpful, but not necessary, if the new exploration links somewhat to your meditation exercises; for example, photography and kasina exercises have an interactive creative stimulus that enhances both. It is also beneficial to your well-being and the uplifting of your inner and outer energy if the new exploration is wholesome.

General Recommendations If You are RESTLESS when Meditating:

- ▶ take a walk or do some moderate exercise, such as Healing Qi Gong, before either starting or resuming your meditation.
- ▶ try the “Counting to Help Focus” exercise on page 2 during your meditation, which can help to restore concentration and focus.
- ▶ vary your posture during the meditation session between sitting, standing, walking, and reclining (see the advice in “Posture”).
- ▶ reduce external distractions as much as possible: turn off the phone, computer, TV, etc. Try soft ear plugs if there's too much uncontrollable external noise.
- ▶ If restlessness is due to illness, injury, anxiety, boredom, etcetera, then those factors need to be dealt with in an appropriate and sensible way that, ideally, supports your meditation.

❁ Trouble-shooting (continued) :

General Recommendations If You are SLEEPY when Meditating:

- ▶ the ambient temperature might be too warm or too cold to maintain alertness. It is important that your head be slightly cool, with your body at a comfortable but moderate temperature.
- ▶ the air might be stuffy and stagnant — and if you can't improve the quality of the air, you may need to change the location where you meditate.
- ▶ your digestive system might be clogged with too much food, in which case you should wait at least an hour before resuming your meditation, and perhaps take a refreshing walk in that interval.
- ▶ ensure you are getting appropriate food and nutriments for health and energy.
- ▶ your body might need energizing, in which case take a walk or do some moderate exercise, such as Healing Qi Gong, before starting or resuming your meditation.
- ▶ if you are ill, you need to attend to the illness before resuming your meditations.
- ▶ you might be bored (in which case refer to “If You are Bored When Meditating” on the preceding page).
- ▶ you might simply be too tired and should then rest before resuming your meditations — if you are deeply exhausted then you may need a lot of rest for a number of days before you will be able to stay alert when meditating.

❁ May You and All Beings be Well and Happy ❁
May All Beings Guide Themselves to Inner Freedom