

THE NINE BREATHINGS OF PURIFICATION

Assume the Five-Point Meditation Posture

When seated on a cushion on the floor: Sit cross-legged, with your spine upright and aligned, and your hands in the position of equipoise. [Rest your hands in your lap with your palms facing up. Place each thumb at the base of the ring finger of the same hand. While keeping the fingers together, rest the left fingers upon the right fingers.] Maintain a space between your elbows and your body as you lift and open your chest, bringing your chin in slightly to allow the back of your neck to lengthen. Lower your eyes and look down along the line of your nose.

When seated in a chair: Either place your feet flat on the floor or cross your legs comfortably at the ankles. Keep your spine upright, free of the support of the back of the chair. All else is as described above for when seated on a cushion.

Reflection

As you rest in the posture, draw your attention to the stillness of your body, the silence of speech, and the spaciousness of mind. In this way, you settle the mind.

Reflect upon the imprints of the recent past, the anticipated future, or perhaps a challenge you are facing in your personal, family, or professional life. Notice any tensions in your body; experience any emotions or notice how this affects your breath; observe whatever occupies your mind. Whatever you experience, connect directly without judgment or analysis. Allow your experience fully.

With the first set of three breaths, as we release our breath through the right white channel, we clear the obstacles of **aversion** or the tendency to push our experience away. With the second set of three breaths, as we release our breath through the left red channel, we clear obstacles of **attachment**, grasping or wanting some other experience. With the third set of three breaths, as we release our breath through the central channel, we clear obstacles related to **ignorance**, the sense of being disconnected or separate, or a sense of doubt and lack of confidence. These three—aversion, attachment, and ignorance—are known as the three poisons.

Now, visualize the three channels of light within your body as described below:

The Three Channels

The central channel begins four finger widths below your navel, rises straight up through the center of your body, and opens at the crown of your head. It is a channel of light, blue like a deep sunlit autumn sky. In diameter, imagine it as the size of your thumb. There are two side channels, one red and one white. They have diameters slightly smaller than the central channel. On your left side is the red channel, on your right, the white channel. The three channels form a junction four finger-widths below the navel in the shape of a soft “w.” The side channels rise straight up the body on either side of the central channel. However, as they approach the crown, they curve forward under the skull, pass behind the eyes, and open at the nostrils. The right white channel supports male energy and skillful means and opens at the right nostril; the left red channel supports female energy and wisdom and opens at the left nostril.



The Analogy

In this practice, we place the attention (rider) on the breath (horse) and follow the path (the channels) to the destination: open awareness.

The First Set of Three Breaths

Raise your right hand with the thumb still pressing the base of the ring finger. Close your right nostril with the ring finger. Inhale a fresh, cleansing breath through the left nostril. Imagine this channel opens in response to the air moving through it as you follow the pathway of the red channel to the junction. Hold your breath for a moment as you cross your hand over and close the left nostril. Exhale slowly, following the pathway up the right white channel, releasing the breath through the right nostril. Repeat this for a total of three breaths. With each exhalation, obscurations associated with the past and with aversion and anger are expelled through the white channel and dissolve into space.

The Second Set of Three Breaths

Change hands and block the left nostril with your left ring finger. Inhale a fresh, cleansing breath through the right nostril. Imagine that this channel opens in response to the air moving through it as you follow the pathway of the white channel to the junction. Hold your breath for a moment as you cross your hand over and close the right nostril. Exhale slowly, following the pathway of the left red channel, releasing the breath through the left nostril.

Repeat this for a total of three breaths. With each exhalation, obscurations associated with the future and with attachment, desire, and wanting are expelled through the red channel and dissolve into space.

The Third Set of Three Breaths

Return both hands to equipoise position as described above. Inhale a fresh, cleansing breath through both nostrils, following the pathways of the side channels to the junction. Hold the breath and attention here for a moment, and then release the breath slowly. While the gross exhalation of impure air moves out through both nostrils, focus upon the subtle wind, imagining that it moves up through the central channel and out through the crown of your head. Repeat this for a total of three breaths. With each exhalation, the obscurations associated with this present moment and with ignorance, lack of confidence, disconnection and doubt are expelled and dissolve into space.

Rest in Open Awareness

At the end of the nine breaths, bring clear attention to the center of the body, to any sense of freshness and openness in the core of your body. Rest or abide in open awareness, letting everything be as it is.

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