

Some Thoughts on Beginning a Meditation Practice (Part 2)

Two Alternative Practices

Following on from the introduction to meditation I offered in part 1, here are two alternative practices that you might like to try.

Candle Gazing

You may like to meditate with a candle anyway but candle gazing is a slightly different, lovely practice to try out. It is simply what it sounds like: place a lighted candle on a safe, sturdy surface and sit comfortably before it. Establish an even, meditative breath (as was described in part 1). With a soft gaze you watch the flame, making it the focus of your meditation rather than the breath. Any time you notice the mind wandering, bring our attention back to the flickering light.



Some people like to treat this almost as a cleansing practice for the eyes - watching the candle until their eyes begin to water then closing them and focussing on the image-memory for a few moments before returning their gaze once more to the flame. If you prefer not to do this blink as and when necessary.

When you have finished, close your eyes. Rub your hands together, getting them nice and warm, then cup them over your eyes and enjoy the feeling of soaking in that warmth. Repeat as you wish then take your hands away and gently open your eyes.

Viloma Pranayama

Pranayama is the umbrella term given to various traditional yogic breath practices. Viloma Pranayama is a good technique for managing anxious feelings since it requires real attentiveness to the breath and can be quite absorbing. It's an 'interrupted breathing technique'. You practice by pausing briefly during either the inhalation or exhalation (or both phases) of the breath.

Sitting comfortably or lying down, experiment with the following:

Interrupting the inhalation:

Breathe in > Pause > Breathe in > Pause > Breathe Out > (Repeat)

Interrupting the exhalation:

Breathe in > Breathe out > Pause > Breathe out > (Repeat)

Interrupting both phases of the breath:

Breathe in > Pause > Breathe in > Pause > Breathe out > Pause > Breathe out > (Repeat)

(cont.)

As you get the hang of it you might add an extra pause or even two. However, remember that this practice should be soothing and calming and should not create stress or discomfort at any point. So if, for instance, you feel light headed or if you have a respiratory issue that makes this in any way a struggle you should stop straight away.

I've found Viloma Pranayama to be really helpful for calming the nerves in difficult situations - in particular, taking a deep breath and then interrupting my exhalation two or three times can really help me to find composure in anxious times or when faced with some sort of confrontation.

I hope you find something helpful here.

Best wishes,

Chris