

Healing Anxiety and Depression

# **Meditations to do at Home**

## **Mind like the Sky**

Think, we are going to do this short reflection for our own benefit, and to share that with all those around us. Nice and relaxed, breathing gently through the nose. If you notice you become distracted, don't get involved, just let it dissolve and keep your focus on the breath.

While you are concentrating on the breath, feel your mind as spacious, like the sky, and any feelings or thought like clouds, arising and dissolving. The sky retains its clear nature, regardless of the momentary weather. If you notice the thoughts... what's today's weather like? Just name it, without judging, getting excited or worried. Above the cloud level, the sky remains clear, boundless, spacious.

Then, gently broaden your field of attention to the space of awareness itself in which you perceive your breath. Instead of focusing on your breath, focus on the awareness itself that perceives the breath.

Your mind is like a huge empty sky of spacious awareness, and the objects that we sense and are conscious of are like clouds floating through that sky. If we identify with the clouds, then we lose all sense of the vastness of the sky, our clear, spacious, knowing mind.

If get caught up in thoughts or feelings, recognise this happens not just to you, but all beings suffer being pushed around by their disturbing emotions. Use the experience of distraction to generate patience and compassion, for yourself and for others. Once your heart opens and your mind stabilises, bring your focus back to the breath, to the spaciousness of your mind, the clarity on which all experiences can arise and fall away.

Whatever appears ... let it arise ... be aware ... and let it pass away. You are the sky. You are the spacious clarity of your mind. You have space to choose which thoughts to follow, and which thoughts to let go. To end the meditation, dedicate your efforts, your good-heartedness, to the ultimate happiness of all beings.

## Perfect Human Rebirth

Sitting comfortably and with your back straight, let any tension dissolve and flow away. Contemplate the nature of your mind as clear like space, vast and unlimited. Our negative thoughts and emotions are transient, like clouds that pass through the sky. Because they come from ignorance and misconceptions, they can be cleared away and the mind can be developed to a state that is completely pure and positive.

But not everyone is in a situation to do this - we are the fortunate ones!

We have the comparative freedom of:

- The limitations of an animal existence. Although beautiful and majestic, most of their life is spent searching for food, seeking shelter, and avoiding being eaten.
- We are free from a life in a country with no religious freedom (Iraq, China). Or where spirituality has been destroyed through revolution (Mongolia, Russia). Or born where no Dharma books translated, or no access to self-help books.
- We are free from a daily struggle in a wheel-chair, or on kidney dialysis, or of deafness or being blind. Or the life of a junkie or alcoholic, enslaved to addiction.
- We are free from a life dominated by wealth or obsessed with power, imprisoned in a gilded cage, so pampered or spoilt that we have no impetus to change.
- We are free from the narrow-mindedness of bigotry or fundamentalism, holding extreme views that hurt others.

We also have some very specific opportunities:

...On a *personal* level, we live in comparative safety, in a country with unprecedented access to all religious views and teachings, with all our faculties of body and mind well and functioning. We have not done anything so bad that it has ruined our life or we ended up in prison. We are interested in personal development, we have an inclination to help others, and an open-minded attitude.

...On a *circumstantial* level we are supported because we are born in an era of educational and political enlightenment. It's not in the dark ages. We have access to an unbroken, living tradition of practitioners with genuine realisations. We have a supportive community, a wealth of information on the internet, and complete religious freedom. All our basic needs are met so we have time inner development.

Now we can begin to get a sense of how fortunate our human life is!

...Hold this panoramic sense of rare good-fortune. We have everything we need to become happy. Spend a moment feeling very joyful about the potential that lies within you. Then slowly open our eyes.

## **Breathing Out the Three Poisons**

Bring your awareness inwards, focussing your attention on your breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. Simply breath in and breath out, allowing no thoughts to distract you. Whenever you notice your attention has wandered, bring your focus back to the breath, again and again. Do this for a few minutes.

Now imagine breathing out all your anger, hatred, urge to retaliate, resentments, and aversion in the form of thick black smoke, like pollution leaving a chimney. As you do so, feel your body gradually becoming clearer and lighter. As you breath in, inhale loving-kindness, patience and warmth in the form of golden light.

Next, imagine breathing out all your dissatisfaction, craving, lust, greed yearning and hunger in the form of red light. Breathe in the golden light of compassion, joy and generosity.

Finally, breathe out all your stupidity, dullness, ignorance, pride, doubt and confusion in the form of light grey smoke or clouds, and breathe in clear light- wisdom, skilfulness, clarity, and effortless ability.

Then, continue breathing in and breathing out clear light for a few minutes.

Notice this is the nature of your mind, the baseline of your emotions. All the afflictive emotions are like pollutants, they are not part of you, and therefore can be removed.

Like a clear glass of water, once the impurities are removed from the water, and once the agitation has stopped....

## **Loving Oneself and Others**

Sitting comfortably and with your back straight, let any tension dissolve and flow away.

Imagine all living beings around you: close family around you, friends behind. In front, those who you dislike or have hurt you. Extending in every direction, right to the horizon, are all other beings, sitting quietly like you.

Consider how nice it would be, for yourself and for others, if you were able to love all these beings. They all want to be happy and avoid suffering, just as you. They are all trying to make the best of their lives, even those who are angry and violent. Now generate a feeling of love in your heart. Think of someone you love and let your natural good feelings for them arise. Imagine your love as a warm, bright light glowing in your heart.

Before you can truly love others you need to love yourself. This means accepting yourself as you are, with your present faults and shortcomings, and recognising you have the potential to free yourself from all your problems. Even though you might be critical, judgemental, or angry towards yourself, really wish yourself all the happiness and goodness there is. Imagine the warm energy in your heart expands, completely filling your body and mind. *"May I be happy. May I have what I need to feel happy, safe, loved and satisfied."*

Now meditate on love for others. Imagine the warm, luminous energy radiating from your body, touching your family and friends and filling their bodies and minds, bringing them the happiness they wish for.

Say in your mind: *"May you be happy. May you have what you need to feel happy, safe, loved and satisfied. May all your thoughts be positive, all your experiences good. May you be free of problems, sickness and sadness. May your lives be long and peaceful, and may you quickly reach enlightenment"*

Then next, some of the people you are not so close to. People you work with, neighbours, shoppers and drivers. They too, just like you, want to be happy. Wish them to be happy thinking *"May you..."* Send the radiant energy of love from your heart and imagine that they experience the happiness they wish for.

Now turn your attention to the people in front, those you have difficulty with. They also need love, perhaps even more than anyone. Wish them to be free of confusion and self-centeredness that drives them to act the way they do. Really want them to find peace of mind, happiness, and enlightenment. Say in your mind *"May you..."* and the radiant energy of love flows from your heart to them and they experience the happiness they wish for.

Continue to send your positive, warm feelings to all the other people around you. Love is an unlimited spring of good energy, no need to worry it will run out! Completely open your heart; your love flowing to every direction, reaching the lonely, the sick, the confused. Their suffering disappears and they become peaceful, clear, and full of happiness. Wish them to have every good experience, from ordinary satisfaction all the way to enlightenment.

Conclude by thinking that you definitely have the potential to love everyone, even those who annoy or hurt you, and those you don't even know. Generate a strong wish to overcome the destructive attitudes of identity and pride, that prevent you from having such love. To creating space in your heart for pure, universal love.

## **Offering Your Body as the Four Elements**

(From Lama Zopa Rinpoche, *Wholesome Fear*)

Adjust your posture, back straight, body comfortable, and release any tension. Bring your mind inwards to the breath.

First, your flesh and bones absorb into the external *earth element*. Your body becomes the stable earth used by all beings for their survival and happiness. As fields and crops; beautiful parks, roads, and vehicles; to obtain gold, diamonds, and other precious jewels; to build houses and cities; to make tunnels and bridges.

Your two eyes become the sun and the moon and work for all beings, illuminating them, guiding them.

Your flesh becomes food for all beings. It absorbs into all the food in the world, in all the supermarkets. You become pizzas, mozzarella cheese, macaroni, hamburgers - the food sustaining everyone. Let your skin become the clothes that keep them warm.

Now the blood, water and other liquids in your body absorb into the external *water element*, which is also used by all beings for their survival and happiness. It floods rice paddies, it flows through irrigation canals it nourishes flowers, it appears as nectar, it quenches thirst everywhere.

Next, the internal heat of your body absorbs into the external *fire element*, which is used by all beings for their happiness. The heat keeps them warm, gives them light, creates energy; heat is used for cooking and survival, for safety and exploration.

Your breath absorbs into the external air, the *wind element*, which is used by all beings for their survival through breathing and moving. Wind is light in nature and enables movement, it grants freedom. Breath is life itself. Let yourself be breathed in by all beings, bringing life-sustaining oxygen to every cell in the body of every being.

In this way, your body, composed of the four elements, becomes like nectar to nourish and support all beings, fulfilling their wishes, giving them ultimate happiness. Dedicate the meditation to being able to actually use the elemental forces in your own body and mind to benefit all beings everywhere.

## **How to Generate Loving-kindness**

(from B. Allan Wallace, *Attention Revolution*)

After settling your body and mind in their natural states, imagine your own pristine awareness—transcending all distortions and afflictions of the mind—as an orb of radiant white light, about a 2 cm in diameter, in the center of your chest. Visualize this orb as an unlimited source of loving-kindness and compassion, as a light of unlimited goodness and joy.

Now bring to mind your vision of your own flourishing as a human being. Imagine the blessings you would love to receive from the world. And imagine the ways in which you would love to become transformed so that you may experience the fulfillment you seek.

Then sincerely generate the aspiration, "May I find happiness and its causes." With each out-breath, imagine light flowing from the inexhaustible source at your heart, permeating every cell of your body and every facet of your mind. This light permeates your whole being, fulfilling your heart's longing with each exhalation...

Now expand your awareness to remember all living beings. All the people, whether friend, stranger or enemy, are seeking happiness. They all want to be happy, but everything is not quite right. There is no real happiness anywhere. Think, how wonderful it would be if they were happy and had all the causes, the skill of happiness. Then with the aspiration, "May they find happiness and its causes," with each out-breath, imagine light flowing from the inexhaustible source at your heart, out in every direction, countless light-rays reaching countless living beings. This light permeates the whole universe, fulfilling each living being's happiness.



## **Meditation on Impermanence**

(From Lama Zopa Rinpoche, *Heart Advice for Death and Dying*)

Sitting comfortably, with your back straight, let your body relax. Let your mind settle into the present moment. Adjust your motivation...

Begin by observing your breathing. Become aware of the impermanence of your breathing. Each breath is different from the one before it and the one that comes after. Notice the changing sensations around the nostrils; your lungs expand and contract, your abdomen rises and falls. With each breath, there is change and flow.

There is change taking place in your body each moment. Notice the movement that is going on each moment: the beating of your heart, the flow of your blood and the energy of your nerve-impulses.

On a more subtle level, neurons are firing, cells are being born, disintegrating, and dying. On an even subtler level, all the parts of your body are made of molecules, atoms, and sub-atomic particles, and these are in constant motion.

Turn your attention to your mind, with thoughts, feelings, memories all following one after the other, ceaselessly. Notice the ever-changing flow of experience, like someone watching a busy street, with cars and pedestrians passing by. Don't cling, judge or make comments—just observe the ever-changing nature of your mind.

Now extend your awareness to the outer world. Your seat, the walls and windows, the other objects in the room. Each of these things, although appearing solid and static, is actually a mass of tiny particles whizzing around in space. Stay with that awareness of the impermanent, constantly-changing nature of these things.

Then let your awareness travel further out. Think of other people: their bodies and minds are also constantly changing, not staying the same for even one moment. The same is true of all living beings, animals, birds and insects. The same for all inanimate objects in the world: houses, buildings, roads, cars, trees, mountains, oceans and rivers, the earth itself, the sun, moon, and stars. All of these things, composed of atoms and minute particles, are constantly changing, every moment.

Conclude by thinking: It is unrealistic and self-defeating to cling to things as though they were permanent. Whatever is beautiful and pleasing will change and eventually disappear, so we can't expect it to give us lasting happiness. Whatever is unpleasant or disturbing won't last forever—it might even change for the better!—so there's no need to be so upset about it or to reject it. Dedicate the positive energy...

## Analysis to Overcome Worry and Stress

(from Kathleen McDonald, *How to Meditate*)

Sit down and make your mind calm with some breathing meditation. Then *allow the fear to come* into the clear spaciousness of your mind. Don't let yourself get caught up in it, but stand back and examine it objectively. Ask yourself, what exactly is it that I am afraid of? Is it reasonable for me to have this fear? Is it likely that what I am afraid of will actually happen? Or is my mind getting carried away?

If it *is* possible that it will happen, then is there anything that you can do to prevent or avoid it? If so, decide to do it, and stop worrying! If there's nothing you can do, or even if you try to prevent it, it might happen anyway, then are there things you can do to prepare yourself for that? Remember *Shantideva*: "Why be worried about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being worried about something that cannot be remedied?" If there's something that can be done to prevent an unwanted situation, we should do it, but if there's nothing that can be done, it's useless to worry; better to relax and accept it!

HH Dalai Lama says the best way to instill *courage and confidence* in yourself is to generate an altruistic motivation for the things you do. If you are feeling nervous about talking to someone, spend some time beforehand contemplating love, compassion, and a sincere wish to benefit others. Filling your mind with concern for others leaves little space for egotistical worries like "will they like me?" or "what will happen to me?". It's natural to encounter problems and painful, undesirable experiences. This is true for you and it is true for all other unenlightened beings - you are not alone! They are "your people". Motivating for others, for something bigger than yourself, gives you the strength of something bigger than you!

Our distressing situation *will not last forever*. You and everyone else have the potential to be free of all suffering, and to experience perfect peace and happiness forever. The root cause of our fear and anxiety is our misconception of our "I" and all other things, seeing them as solid, real, and permanent, including seeing ourselves as limited, incapable, helpless. But the nature of *our* mind is the same as the Buddha's! The only difference is that the Buddha has eliminated all delusions, while we still believe the chimera of our fear to be real. An enlightened mind is *free from all fears*. Even if you feel the whole world is against you, the Buddhas love you more than you love yourself - their sole purpose is to help you. Allow yourself to become open to their help...

## **Feeling Tone Meditation**

(from Martine Batchelor, *Let Go*, with addition of the 8 sufferings))

Adjust your posture so you are comfortable, and become aware of the feeling of your body in space. Feel your feet on the floor, the stability of your seat, and allow yourself to become stable and grounded. Then gently bring your awareness inwards.

How do you feel at this moment?

Do you experience a pleasant feeling tone as you are sitting with ease?

Is the feeling tone somewhat unpleasant as you sit feeling a little agitated and restless?

As nothing is happening in this moment, do you feel bored? You could use this neutral feeling tone to rest in the calming rhythm of the breath.

Do you feel buoyant and happy? Try to experience and appreciate these feelings of happiness without grasping at those feelings.

Do you feel low and grey? Try to be with that feeling, knowing it fully without sinking into it or identifying with it. You are not reducible to any one feeling.

In this spaciousness, allow yourself to acknowledge our common human condition:

Highs and lows (never stable or content)

Uncertainty (relationships come and go, job, health)

Loneliness (so much social media yet so much isolation)

Dissatisfaction (boredom, disappointment, craving)

Problems with our body (master new skills, aging)

Notice how these constant stressors affect you, the underlying sense of dis-ease they bring. What do you feel in the solar plexus? Notice the texture of the feeling before giving it a name. Now breathe softly into it. If you feel a disturbing emotion, dissipate its energy by focusing on the breath and relaxing the whole body.

Notice the story line in the mind that accompanies the disturbing emotion. See if you can let go of that story line.

Feel the whole body and mind as spacious and stable.

As you bring your awareness back to the room, try to continue to be conscious of your feeling tones throughout the day - in a kind and non-judgmental way. Remain interested but not self-obsessed. Dedicate your efforts to showing that kindness to yourself and others, and thus creating a more peaceful environment.

## **Experiencing the Kindness of Others**

(from Lorenzo Rosello, *Spiritual Friends: Meditation of the IMI*)

I was born in dependence on my mother and father. Only due to their kindness was I able to survive and grow, since I was born completely helpless and unprotected. My education was a result of the kindness and patience of my teachers, and the infinite resource they granted me by teaching me to read. My knowledge has also developed in dependence on my friends, because they supported me, and I could discuss my uncertainties with them. Each moment of happiness, each positive experience requires an interpersonal relationship.

Every possession I enjoy is the result of some form of kindness I receive from other beings. The meat I eat and the milk I drink comes from the kindness of cows. The vegetables and cereals from the hard work of many farmers, who constantly struggle on my behalf. Each type of machine or device I uses is the result of countless hours of hard work in that industry, and countless hours of invention stretching back centuries. The house I live in that protects me from the elements is the result of the work of builders, carpenters, engineers, architects and others. I don't even know them, yet I receive continuous benefit from them.

The environment in all its multifarious aspects, which we consider as pleasant mountains, lakes, forests, the sea - involves me and all beings in a relationship of interdependence, since it is the basis of our very existence. Who doesn't want to live in a clean, harmonious, uncontaminated environment? Just by looking at it my mind becomes calm and relaxed.

By clearly recognizing the web of interdependent relationships that support us, surely we must conclude how important it is to cultivate non-violent actions towards all beings and towards the environment itself? This is possible only if I possess a love that wishes others true happiness, and a compassion that wishes all others to be free of every kind of suffering.

By the power of compassion I will be able to avoid harming others. By the power of love I will try to benefit others. These should be supported by the wisdom realizing all phenomena as interconnected. I need to manifest my love and kindness supported by this wisdom, so it does not become biased, so it does not just favour those close to me, but encompasses all living beings, just as my life does.

Imagine in the space in front of you all the sentient beings who are pervaded by the various kinds of sufferings that come from being controlled by the bullying disturbing emotions. May all these beings without exception be completely free from suffering and its causes. Try to generate your mind as a manifestation of compassion itself.

The greatest power human beings can generate is kindness. Through loving kindness it is possible to pacify and subdue every mind - children in a tantrum, brutalised soldiers, mistreated guard-dogs, destructive ex-partners. Generate love to all sentient beings who lack happiness and its causes. By the force of this thought, ensure that your heart and mind is generated into love itself.

Dedicate your efforts in this meditation to use each circumstance of your everyday life - work, study, travel, and even those things that are difficult - to put your experiences during meditation into practice. Only by doing this will you be able to destroy the actual enemy, the afflictive emotions, and to create the causes for true peace. Determine that all your actions performed for the benefit of others should be done in a kind and respectful way.

## **Seed of Light Mediation**

(From Kathleen McDonald, *How to Meditate*)

Splash some cool water on your face, do a couple of stretches, and sit down in a clean, peaceful place.

Adjust your posture to be alert but relaxed. First, make sure your back is straight and your head is not bent forward too far. Open your eyes half way and meditate with your gaze directed a few meters in front of you. Increasing the amount of light in the room should also help you stay alert.

Start by visualising the central channel as a transparent, hollow tube, a finger's breadth in diameter. It runs straight down through the centre of the body, just in front of the spinal column, from the crown of your head to the base of your spine.

Next, visualise the right and left lateral channels, slightly thinner than the central one. They start from the right and left nostrils respectively, travel upward to the top of the head and then curve over to run downward on either side of the central channel. They curve inward and join the central channel at a point approximately four fingers' breath below the level of the navel.

Imagine your mind enclosed within a tiny round seed whose upper hemisphere is white and whose lower hemisphere is red, situated in the central channel at the level of your navel. Concentrate on this until the mind has quieted down.

Then, the seed shoots up the central channel and out through the crown of your head. The seed opens and your mind merges with vast, empty space. Concentrate on this experience for a while.

Having reached a state of clarity, it is good to use it to discover the nature of your mind, by contemplating the following questions:

Is the feeling permanent or impermanent? How? Why?

Is the feeling blissful or suffering? How? Why?

Is the feeling related or unrelated to the nervous system? How? How is it related to the mind?

Does the feeling exist from its own side, without depending on anything else? What are the other factors?

Recognise that your mind is like vast empty space, in which all experiences can arise and fall away. You are not reducible to any one thought or feeling. Your nature is like that vast, radiant spaciousness and clarity.

Dedicate the meditation to your speedy enlightenment for the sake of all living beings.

## **Nine-round Breathing**

Settle the posture, finding a balance between a straight spine and a relaxed body. Release any tension from the shoulders, pull them slightly back to open up the chest and heart area. Bring your awareness inwards, focussing on the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. Simply breathing in and breath out, without distraction.

Now bring to mind the people who love you, care about you, looked after you throughout your life. Who worry about you, who are so happy when good things happens to you, who support you. Feel their love as golden light that surrounds you. Now think of all the people who have indirectly benefitted you, you might not know them, but you enjoy their kindness. The first responders, the teachers and counsellors that grow our society up. Also the people back through history, their sacrifices in making a democratic, safe society. Imagine all this effort and care as golden light that surrounds you, enveloping you in warmth and safety. Think of all the Buddhas who love you more than you do yourself, whose sole purpose is to help you and care for you. Imagine this as a great radiance surrounding you. Love, compassion and wisdom filling all of space around you.

Now, imagine that you are breathing in through right nostril and out through the left. No need to physically block your nostrils, it's not so much following the breath, as the energy. As you breath in, inhale all the light, love and wisdom surrounding you, deeply into your being. As you breath out through left nostril, you exhale all your negativities in the form of black smoke. Breath out all disturbing emotions, obsessions and restlessness, anger or despair, doubt and confusion. They leave your body like pollution from a chimney, disappearing into space. Do this three time, long deep breaths.

Now swap the nostrils over, this time breathing in through the left, the love, wisdom, kindness and infinite knowledge surrounding you, in the form of golden light. You absorb all the, joyousness and energy of the buddhas. Three long, leisurely breaths.

Finally, imagine breathing out through both nostrils and in through both nostrils, completely releasing all the inner disturbances and unhappiness, and fully breathing in all the infinite enlightened qualities in the form of blissful light that absorbs into you. Every atom of your body radiant and energised. Do this three times.

Once you have completed this cycle, continue breathing radiant, clear light. Like the clarity of the air at dawn, just before the sun rises. Just a very fine membrane between the outside and the inside, with clear radiance permeating all.

## **Mindfulness Meditation**

(From Rick Hanson, *Buddha's Brain*)

Find a posture that is both relaxed and alert, with your spine reasonably straight. Handle your mind like a skilful rider of a horse, with neither too tight nor too loose with the reins.

Take a big breath and relax, with your eyes open or closed. Be aware of sounds coming and going, and let them be whatever they are. Know that you are taking this time to meditate. You can drop all concerns during this period, like setting down a heavy bag before plopping into a comfortable chair. After the meditation you can pick up those concerns again - if you want to!

Bring your awareness to the sensations of breathing. Don't try to control the breath; let it be whatever it is. Sense the cool air coming in and warm air going out. The chest and belly rising and falling.

Try to stay with the sensations of each breath from beginning to end. You may want to softly count your breaths - count to ten and then start over; go back to one if the mind wanders - or note them quietly to yourself as "in" and "out". It's normal for the mind to wander, and when it does, just return to the breath. Be gentle and kind with yourself.

See if you can stay attentive to ten breaths in a row (usually a challenge at first).

After your mind settles down during the first minutes of the meditation, explore becoming increasingly absorbed in the breath and letting go of everything else. Open to the simple pleasures of breathing, given over to the breath. With some practice, see if you can stay present with the breath for dozens of breaths in a row.

Using the breath as a kind of anchor, be aware of whatever else is moving through the mind. Aware of thoughts and feelings, wishes and plans, images and memories - all coming and going. Let them be what they are; don't get caught up in them; don't struggle with or get fascinated by them. Have a sense of acceptance - even kindness - toward whatever passes through the open space of awareness.

Keep settling into the breath, perhaps with a growing sense of peacefulness. Be aware of the changing nature of what passes through the mind. Notice how it feels to get caught up in the passing contents of awareness - and how it feels to let them go by. Be aware of peaceful, spacious awareness itself.

When you like, bring the meditation to an end. Notice how you feel, and take in the goodness of your meditation.