**Meditation on the breath**

When we start to meditate ideally we use an object upon which to focus but it is important to realize our focus must not be too narrow. When we are concentrating upon a particular focus we must have two elements to our concentration. First we have a central awareness which takes the form of the subject itself such as the breath or a candle but very importantly there is also a secondary peripheral awareness where we must allow ourselves to also be aware of everything surrounding the central focus, such as the walls and floor of the room we are in, other students, a clock ticking, the sound of rain upon a window etc. This is necessary because if we hold our attention too tightly upon the object of our focus our body and mind will also become tense, it is also better to be aware of the situation surrounding us so we can accept it and be unsurprised by it. By placing approximately 80% of our awareness in our central focus and the remaining 20% of our awareness within the peripheral focus it is more likely we will one day actually fully move inwards with great ease, meditation must firstly be relaxation before it is concentration.

Another way to expand our awareness and relax the mind is to provide two different focal points simultaneously, this helps greatly to keep the mind concentrated without tension and after a while we can take the mind back to a single point of focus.

When working with the breath as an anchor for the mind it is usually either upon the movement of air passing at the nostrils or the movement created at the belly although we can certainly develop other ways of concentrating upon the breath. In yoga there is one whole system of prana vidya, or the science of prana where we work ever more subtly with the movement of the breath or prana.

Technique:

To work with this meditation initially settle the body…… and begin by breathing through the nostrils as you focus upon the movement of the abdomen…..keep breathing focusing upon the movement of the abdomen relaxing the breath…..relaxing the body………continue in this way….notice what you are aware of in your immediate vicinity and keep a small portion of your awareness within that which is immediately surrounding you as you let most of your awareness be upon the movement of your abdomen as you breathe…….

After a few minutes continue to notice the rise and fall of your breath moving your abdomen as you begin to count the breath, counting on each inhalation only from 0 to 21………. As you continue allow the mind to be absolutely relaxed simply resting the mind upon the movement of the breath and the numbers as you count….there is no reason to hurry or worry about getting it right……… Do not try to stop thinking…………… continue relaxing the body, breath and mind……

If at any point the mind becomes distracted by a sound, a smell, a movement etc. or a thought arises then simply label the distraction for example ‘dinner cooking’ or ‘what I will be doing after the class’ and return to the focus of the breath, starting again at 0 and counting upwards on the exhalations……… If thoughts or distractions arise of their own accord again simply label them as before, let them go returning to the breath and resume your counting. Remember it is not a failure to begin counting again, you are simply focusing and then seeing what arises in your mental field………..

After five to ten minutes release the counting and continue by resting awareness only on the rise and the fall of the breath, allow your peripheral awareness to be aware of your surroundings and when necessary continue to label any distractions occurring………….. Practicing for approximately 15 minutes in total………

Daily meditation

See if you can keep a portion of your awareness upon the movement of the breath as you move through your day. This keeps us more centered and helps us to calm the mind and emotions because of course when the breath is steady the mind and emotions will be steadied. Some spiritual traditions such as the Sufi tradition use this as an everyday meditation so that our outer life becomes synchronized with our inner life.