

## Basic Shamata Meditation

by Khenpo Drimed Dawa

Shamata (shaw-maw-taw) means single-pointed calm abiding. It is the most basic of all Buddhist meditations.

First, find a quiet and comfortable place to meditate without being disturbed for 15-20 minutes. Comfortable clothing is recommended. And it is best when the temperature is not too warm or too cool. You may sit on the floor, a cushion, or even a chair.

To do the meditation, one sits in an upright position with legs crossed (or feet on the floor if sitting in a chair) and hands in your lap, palms up, right on left, and with the tips of the thumbs touching (as if holding a large egg). The back is straight, head tilted slightly down, and eyes are open looking down. Some sources teach meditation with the eyes closed, but Tibetan Buddhism usually keeps the eyes open. One is less likely to get drowsy, some advanced practices must be done with eyes open, and the ideal is to be able to remain in a state of meditative equipoise even when you get up from your meditation. All of these are reasons for habituating yourself to meditating with your eyes open. Nevertheless, you may do it with your eyes closed if you prefer.

Once you are comfortable select an object of focus. In this case, we will use our breath. It is always with us, so we can use it to meditate any time or any place! There are several ways to focus on your breath. Here we will focus on the rise and fall of the abdomen as we breathe in and out. Take 3 deep slow breaths to begin, paying attention to the rise and fall of your breath. Then continue breathing naturally, but still focusing your attention on the rise and fall of your abdomen. If you get distracted or thoughts arise, simply re-focus your attention and continue.

In the beginning, it is best to do shorter, quality meditations, e.g., 5 minutes, then stretch, relax for a moment, take a few more deep breaths and begin again. Three or four short sessions are sufficient in the beginning. As your ability to focus without thoughts or other distractions improves, you can lengthen the periods and do fewer sessions until you can stay focused for 20-30 minutes.

The masters of this particular practice are said to be capable of placing their focus on any object and remaining without effort for as long as they like – even days! But this is *so* rare that it is highly unlikely. A challenging, but more realistic goal would be to be able to do so for a period of up to 4 hours. Even this would place you among the elite of shamata meditation masters!

In Tibetan, the word for meditation means habituation. So the process of learning to meditate is one of habituating our mind to remain focused with a minimum of effort. This takes patience and persistence, just like learning to play a musical instrument. It will be easier for some, harder for others. But don't give up. Stay with it.

You are most likely to be successful if you *enjoy* the process. So relax, let be and let go! Although we are seeking a state of stillness of body, speech and mind, it is okay to make an adjustment to be more comfortable than to habituate yourself to discomfort.

You may also find it helpful to keep a pencil and pad close by to make notes about your practice immediately afterwards. This can be very helpful in recognizing your successes and difficulties, so that you can continue to improve.