

Meditation Skill 13: Cultivate Skill in Stabilising

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Summary

Marker 09 arises as a natural progression of deepening tranquility of mind due to samadhi founded on letting go. This correlates with a natural resting of attention on one point of breath sensation at the tip of the nose and a fading into the background of the perception of time.

At this stage your attention becomes so aligned with the perception of breath sensation, so stable, that all perception of time fades into the background. With the fading of the perception of time, comes the fading of the idea 'this is an in-breath, this is an out-breath'.

Learn to allow your attention to rest on one point of breath sensation at the tip of your nose. The shift of attention from sensations within the length of each breath, to one point of sensation at the tip of the nose, is due to natural development of tranquility. With practice you will experience shifts from effort to maintain your attention, to effortlessness as tranquility (as calming of effort/doing) deepens. This shift is very distinct.

Your main goal is to learn to move from intentional vitakka (intentional applying of attention) to vicara (your mind now autonomously applies attention to the meditation object). It is this shift to sustained attention (vicara) that gives rise to the experience of effortlessness. This is replaced by what is experienced as: one steady, continuous, point of sensation with barely any idea of breathing or time, free from gross sensory distraction.

Detailed Instructions

What You Are Learning this Lesson

To develop stable attention on one point of breath sensation free from subtle wandering, dullness and restlessness.

Create Your Posture for Meditation

Begin meditation by sitting comfortably on a chair or the floor. Seated, place the tips of your fingers below your belly button and slightly press in.

Allow your eyelids to gently close over and relax, feeling that relaxation and bring to mind the purpose of this meditation: to bring deep relaxation to your body with slow softening breaths.

Establish Mindfulness on the Touch of Your Thumbs

MARKER 1

Once your body and mind have relaxed into your meditation posture, bring awareness just to the touch of your thumbs, establishing a stream of remembering on it.

Apply a gentle label by silently saying: "touching, touching".

Keep these labels relaxed with a pause between each word and notice the affect this has on the application of your attention.

Widen Awareness to the World Around You Breath

MARKER 2

Once your attention has settled on the touch of your thumbs, widen your awareness to the room around you.

What it feels like to be in this room.

The touch of air on your skin, the flow of distant sounds, the happiness of the ease that comes with nothing to do.

Apply a gentle label by silently saying: "hearing, hearing" for sounds, or "knowing, knowing", for the experience of the room. Keep these labels relaxed with a pause between each word and notice the affect this has on the application of your attention.

Become Aware of Your Body as it Sits.

MARKER 3

Once your attention has settled on the experience of the room around you, gently soften and allow your awareness to naturally narrow into the experience of your body as it sits, establishing a stream of remembering on it.

Apply a gentle label by silently saying: "sitting, sitting". Keep these labels relaxed with a pause between each word and notice the affect this has on the application of your attention.

Gently soften Into Sensations in Your Body

MARKER 4

Begin to soften and relax awareness into your body, becoming aware of any sensations present. Relax into sounds, into warmth, coolness and pressure with the chair/floor.

Apply a gentle label by silently saying: "warm, warm", "cool, cool", "pressure, pressure".

Keep these labels relaxed with a pause between each word and notice the affect this has on the application of your attention.

Observe the Natural Movement of Your Body as it Breathes.

MARKER 5

As you soften into your body, the natural flow of breathing will appear to you as a subtle movement in your body, establish a stream of remembering on it.

Know if Breath is Coming In or Going Out

MARKER 6

Notice that you can know if your breath is drawing into your body, or if it is going out again.

As the breath draws in, apply a gentle label by silently saying: "in, in", in line with the in-breath.

As the breath goes out, apply a gentle label by silently saying: "out, out", in line with the out-breath.

Establish a continuous stream of remembering regarding knowing each in, and out-breath.

Know the Full Length of Each Breath

MARKER 7

When you can stay with the flow of each in and out breath, then see if you can notice the very moment each breath begins. To do this simply be aware of each out-breath all the way to its end, relax, and wait for the breath to draw back in by itself.

In this way the full length of each in-breath from its beginning to its middle, to its end will become clearer to you.

Once you have experienced an in-breath, relax, and wait for the out-breath to happen naturally, by itself. In this way you will be aware of the length of each out-breath.

Treat this like a game, be playful.

Be careful of over-straining at this stage, being soft and gentle in your observation. Use your softening skills to relax if you find you are becoming tight. Expanding your awareness to your whole body and watching from afar can also help with this.

Clarity of the full length of each breath develops through increasing calm and tranquility. As your mind and body calm, your ability to mindfully observe more subtle experiences will increase.

Tip: Finding the pleasure within each breath, its gentle stretch as it comes in, its natural relax as it goes out, how good it feels. This is the key to calming while maintaining alertness.

Be Aware of Sensations Within Each Breath

MARKER 8

Once you have become clearer regarding the length of each breath, go through the process of calming of excess effort to allow tranquility to develop and increase the sensitivity of your mind.

Abandon all Desire 'to do' the Meditation

Gradually soften and relax your desire 'to do' the meditation. Your task here is to gently calm the intellectual function of your mind while increasing the knowing function of awareness.

If the intellectual 'doing' is too high, then subtle restlessness will be present, and attention will not stabilise on one point of breath preventing tranquility from arising. If when calming the intellectual 'doing' you also over calm the ability of awareness 'to know', then you may inadvertently create the conditions for subtle dullness to arise.

To find this balance it is helpful to first calm the functions of your body by softening, accessing the pleasure of this relaxation. Then while aware of the pleasure of the relaxation of the body, allow it to enter your mind as you let go of the desire 'to do'.

In this way your mind will bind to the pleasure and the imbalance of slipping into subtle dullness will be avoided.

Allow Attention to rest on One Point of Breath Sensation

MARKER 9

Learn to allow your attention to rest on one point of breath sensation at the tip of your nose. The shift of attention from sensations within the length of each breath, to one point of sensation at the tip of the nose, is due to natural development of tranquility.

With practice you will experience shifts from effort to maintain your attention, to effortlessness as tranquility (as calming of effort/doing) deepens. This shift is very distinct.

Your main goal is to learn to move from intentional vitakka (intentional applying of attention) to vicara (your mind now autonomously applies attention to the meditation object). It is this shift to sustained attention (vicara) that gives rise to the experience of effortlessness.

Important Points

Seeking perfection

The practice of attention resting on one point of breath sensation is not a perfection. Attention rests on one point of sensation at the tip of the nose due to the development of tranquility not due to effort.

Attention rests on one point:

The practice of attention resting on one point of breath sensation is not a perfection but a general term that describes the increasing steadiness of attention, experienced as a decreased 'going out' to the six sense fields.

Attention rests on one point of sensation at the tip of the nose due to the development of tranquility not due to effort. I use the word 'allow' because this suggests a 'getting out of the way' that leads to the development of tranquility of body, breathing and mind.

Perception of time fades into the background

As you calm the intellectual functions of your mind, the perception of time will also weaken. This is experienced as a disappearance of the concept 'I am breathing in; I am breathing out' or any idea that there is such a thing as the length of the breath.

For sensations along the length of the breath to be perceived, there must also be a concept of time. While this perception of time and breathing may weaken, it still may be in the background and able to be brought to the foreground of attention at will.

Concept of observing over time

When this concept of observing over time is let go of, sensations within the length of each breath will shift to knowing of one point of changing breath sensation. As mentioned before this arises through calming and increasing tranquility, not through effort.

It is on this one point of changing breath sensation that you allow your attention to rest so that it may stabilise on it.

This takes skill in letting go of all control, and a subtle sensitivity to balancing effort 'to do' within the mind. To do this make sure that you maintain within your peripheral awareness two things:

1. The structure of your attention regarding meditative joy and tranquility.
2. Curiosity into calming effort while increasing clarity so that you can make adjustments.

Subtle wandering

Regarding maintaining balance, if you notice subtle 'going out' of your attention towards sounds, thoughts etc., simply the underlying effort of your attention to go out and engage with experience. When you soften, always tune into the subtle pleasure of each softening, letting go to offer your mind an alternative reward.

Subtle dullness

If the one point of breath sensations starts to become dull and difficult to perceive, then you need to increase the knowing of your awareness by paying more attention to detail. Tuning

into the changing sensation within each breath, particularly at the stage of breath length, while tuning into meditative joy, the subtle pleasure of letting go, is the key.

If this is difficult at this stage be more methodical in paying attention to sensations from the beginning of each meditation session, in this way you will reach this stage of samadhi without the risk of subtle dullness.

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