

Concentration Techniques

From Matthieu Ricard's Why Meditate?

These methods of focusing or reviving your concentration can be used at the beginning, middle or end of a meditation period. You can use them during times of difficulty and then let them go as you become centered for the balance of your chosen practice period.

1. Counting Your Breaths

Count your breaths by mentally counting "one" at the end of a complete out/in or in/out breath cycle, then "two" at the end of the next cycle, and so on up to 10. Then begin again at one. This will help maintain your concentration.

2. Mentally Repeating Numbers

Repeat "one, one, one, one . . ." smoothly over the course of an in-breath, then "two, two, two, two . . ." in the same way over the course of the next out-breath. For the next cycle, count "three, three, three, three . . ." during the in-breath, "four, four, four, four . . ." during the out-breath. Count that way up to ten and then start a new series.

3. Mentally repeating a Phrase

You can also associate a simple phrase with the coming and going of the breath. Breathing in you can mentally say, "May all beings be happy," and while breathing out, "May all beings be free."

4. A Silent Mantra

You can combine silent recitation of a mantra with attention to the breath. Thus with OM MANI PADME HUM which is the mantra of the Buddha of Compassion, you can say OM while breathing in, Mani Padme while holding the breath for a few seconds, and HUM while breathing out. (The Sanskrit word mantra combines the root man ("to think") with the suffix tra ("instrument" or "tool"). Therefore, mantra means literally "tool for thinking.")