

Candle Meditation

We have used sound to develop focus and we have used an image of a favorite place to hone our skills of concentration over the past 6 weeks. This week we are going to use a visual point to focus our attention.

Preparation:

- Use a candle, preferably a ¾” or 1” candle that burns with the wick and flame clearly visible. The focal point of attention will be the flame. Light the candle.
- Begin your session by lying down for the basic relaxation technique if you wish. Or sitting in a chair if you find yourself dropping off to sleep as your relaxation deepens. Once fully relaxed, you will sit up. You can sit in a chair, sit up and lean against a wall or the sofa as well. Or you can sit in a cross-legged position. Whichever position you choose, your back must remain straight without excessive tension.
- Once in your chosen seated position, do four to five minutes of the 4-4-8 breathing technique. Remember to control this breath with the lower abdomen. As always, if 4-4-8 is too difficult, change the count to 3-3-6. That is, breathe in to a count of 3, pause to a count of 3, and release to a count of 6. After five minutes of this breathing exercise, you should feel calm and the mind will be quieted.

Now for the concentration technique, the candle meditation. Quietly open your eyes and look at the candle flame. It may be moving slightly with the air movement in the room. Or your breath may cause the flame to flicker. Or it may be perfectly still. Gaze at it and notice the colors that range from orange to blue to white. Notice how the flame hovers around the wick and yet seem somehow detached.

Once you have explored all the thoughts related to the flame and how it looks, stop the thoughts – not with inner shouting of “STOP!” but by simply calming the chatter in your mind and focusing with your eyes.

The purpose of this exercise is to focus with the eyes and not think about what you are seeing. If you can initially focus for 20 seconds without an intruding thought, you are doing well. Your goal is a full five minutes of candle gazing without any intervening thoughts.

You can control your mind if your approach is gentle, but firm. You are not the slave to your mind; you master your thoughts as you focus and determine to direct your attention with control.

The importance of developing this skill will be appreciated further down the road as you begin to intentionally focus on specific goals. Without direct control, focused intention, and a determined outlook, you will always experience less than perfect success in your efforts toward creating the life you wish.

Don't be discouraged when the mind seems like a frisky monkey. The way to combat this disorderly activity in the mind is to step back and just watch where the mind takes you. At some point in this observation, you will find yourself taking back the control as the frisky monkey slows down and finally stops.

Practice this technique consistently and often until you feel the strength of mental control a daily success.

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