

Gatha meditation

This meditation teaches you to take your meditation off of the mat and out into your life! Gathas are small poems that help us practice mindfulness in our daily activities, whether we are sitting, walking or peeling potatoes. A **gatha** can open and deepen our experience of simple acts which we often take for granted. When we focus our mind on gathas they help us to bring the uninterrupted practice of **meditation** into every part of our day. Gatha poems are like a tool that we give our “thinking mind” something to do, so that your “observing mind” has a chance to take hold and grow stronger. In this meditation, we are focusing on the repeating of a gatha poem in our mind, and this is our object of meditation.

Gathas are small poems, a short phrase or a word, that help us with our meditation routine. We can have specific gathas for specific activities. We can have gathas for waking up in the morning, for turning on the light, for turning on the television, for answering the telephone, for driving the car. The list of gathas can be as long as there are activities. See below for a list of gathas and our references for more gathas.

Gatha poems serve several purposes:

- (1) A gatha poem occupies our thinking;
- (2) They give the constant rush of thoughts in our minds a break by focusing on something else and being more observant or mindful;
- (3) They help with providing a direction for your practice.

When you have chosen a gatha, the exercise is a lot like meditations that concentrate on breathing. Remain seated in a calm fashion and repeat your gatha in your mind. Do not make any sound. When your mind wanders away, take it back to your gatha again.

After several minutes, drop to just the one-word cue in the second column of our example, while simultaneously keeping it linked with the flow of each breath. After a few more minutes, as your focus steadies, release the words and settle your awareness on the breath. If you become restless again, return to the gatha until your awareness stabilizes again.

“Go with the flow”, but remain aware of everything that happens. As is the case with every kind of meditation, we try not to judge, and not to be too goal-oriented. Every time we wander away in our mind, we simply return to our Gatha.

Gatha Meditation Exercise

In this example, we have chosen for the gatha “I am breathing in, I am breathing out”

Full Sentence	One-Word Cue
I am breathing in	In
I am breathing out	Out
Breathing in, I calm my body	Calming
Breathing out, I smile	Smiling

1. Sit down in your favorite posture, close your eyes and settle down.

Gatha Meditation

Kind of meditation	Concentration/focus
Degree of difficulty	Beginners/more advanced students
Recommended duration	5 to 45 minutes
Posture	Sitting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It improves your concentration • It gives you a clear, calm mind. • It improves your breathing. • It helps against stress. • It improves the quality of your life.
Advantages	
Remark	A simple and useful meditation to gain focus. It is an exercise for beginners that you can do for the rest of your life.

2. Relax in your chair with your feet on the floor, hands resting in your lap, and back straight.
3. Allow your awareness to settle on your breath for a few moments
4. Be aware of every breathing in and every breathing out. Observe how the air slowly passes in through your nose, fills up your lungs and goes out again.
5. As you continue to watch the breath, begin to link the lines of the Gatha to your breathing. Mentally repeat the sentence "I am breathing in" with the in breath, "I am breathing out" with the out breath.
6. "I am breathing in", "I am breathing out"
7. Now drop to just the one-word cue. "in" on the in breath, "Out" on the out breath.
8. Once your concentration has stabilized a bit, you can try releasing the words, and simply letting your awareness settle on the breath.
9. When you start to think of something else or you start to feel something else, just observe this and return to the gatha.
10. If all of a sudden you notice twinkling's in your body, or relaxation reactions in your muscles, that is fine..... observe and go back to the gatha.
11. Now slowly bring your thoughts back to the rest of your body and the sounds in the room. Move a little, stretch your muscles a little and open your eyes.
12. Finished!

Very simple, effective and pleasant. The more often you do it, the longer you will be able to stay with your gatha. At first, only a few seconds, then half a minute, and eventually longer. Do not forget that at first, it is not strange at all if your mind gets restless, and you can only keep concentrated on your gatha for a few seconds. Please do not give up when things do not go so well. We guarantee you that you will always feel better and more relaxed after the session and after some time, the long-term advantages will automatically come your way. Realize that meditation is not goal-oriented and that less successful sessions are just part of the process.

Resources:

<https://plumvillage.org/mindfulness-practice/gatha-poems/>

<http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/buddhism/2004/02/gathas-for-mindfulness.aspx>

<https://mindfulgatha.wordpress.com/gathas/>

Sitting for Meditation

(By Andrew Weiss)

Sitting in the present moment,
I breathe mindfully.
Each in-breath nourishes love,
Each out-breath, compassion.

Sitting Meditation

(By Andrew Weiss)

Each thought, each feeling
Creates the world.
I hold joy and suffering
Tenderly in each breath.

Calming the Mind

(By Andrew Weiss)

Chasing after the world
Brings chaos.
Allowing it all to come to me
Brings peace.

Problems at Work

(by Robert Aitkin, Roshi)

When things fall apart on the job
I vow with all beings
To use this regretful energy
And pick up the pieces with care.

Hugging (by Thich Nhat Hanh)

I am so happy to hug my dear
I know (s)he is real in my arms.

Going to Sleep

(by Robert Aitkin, Roshi)

Falling asleep at last
I vow with all beings
To enjoy the dark and the silence
And rest in the vast unknown.

