

# Class Outline: Introduction to Meditation

## Orientation to KTC

KTC is a meditation center in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

The name of the center is *Karma Thegsum Choling*, which is a Tibetan phrase. This means “Place of the Buddha’s Teaching of the Three Vehicles of the Karma Kagyu Tradition.”

“Place of the Buddha’s Teaching” means the teachings we present here originated with the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who lived 2,500 years ago.

The words “Three Vehicles” refer to the three paths of Buddhism, or in other words, the complete teachings of the Buddha.

Finally, “Karma Kagyu tradition” refers to one of the four major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism.

The meditation instructions that we’re going to talk about come from KTC’s founder, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. Rinpoche is part of an unbroken lineage going back to the 11th century, and before that, to the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, 2,500 years ago.

The meditation that we’re discussing today can be practiced by anyone.

**The Buddhist point of view** is that people are fundamentally good. This means that regardless of our history and current situation, all of us are human beings. As human beings, each of us has a mind that is innately aware and clear. And each of us has as our potential perfect compassion and wisdom.

## The Buddhist Path

According to the teachings of the Buddha, we can realize our innate positive qualities by following what has come to be known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

**This path is summarized in four brief slogans:**

1. **“Do no harm,”** means we should do our best to avoid harming ourselves and others.
2. **“Practice virtue,”** means we should be as helpful and beneficial to others as we can.
3. **“Tame the mind,”** means we should train our mind using the methods of meditation.
4. **“This is the teaching of the Buddha,”** gives us the source and significance of this advice.

The **meditation practice** we’re discussing this morning is calm abiding meditation. This is called **shamata** meditation in Sanskrit and **shinay** in Tibetan. The essence of calm abiding meditation is that we place our attention on the breath. When our attention wanders, we notice this, let go of the distraction, and return our attention to the breath in an open, gentle way.

## The Physical Posture

1. Sit in a **stable, cross-legged posture**. If we have physical limitations, we can sit on a meditation bench or a straight-backed chair.
2. **“Drawing up.”** We tuck the buttocks under us, close and tighten the internal sphincter muscles of elimination, pull our abdomen in and up, and then relax.

3. **Placing the hands.** We touch the tip of the thumb to the first joint of the ring finger, and fold the fingers into a soft fist. We place the hands palms down on the knees and brace the arms.
4. **Straighten the lower part of the back.** A good way to do this is to stick out the stomach and lean back just a little. Another way is to mentally locate the breast bone and pull it up.
5. Pull the **chin in slightly**, so that we feel the neck align with the spine.
6. In the sixth step, we place the **tongue against the upper palate**.
7. In the seventh step, we place the **gaze of the eyes**. We focus briefly on the tip of the nose. Then we extend our gaze, at the same angle, to about 18 inches in front of us. We relax our eyes.

## The Mental Technique

1. Place our attention on the breath as we inhale and exhale.
2. Count silently each time we exhale.
3. When our attention wanders, we notice this, label the distraction “thinking” and let it go, and gently return our attention to the breath.

If we remember where we were in the sequence of counting, we can continue from where we left off. If we don't remember where we were, we simply start over again at “one.” When our count reaches “21,” we start over again at “one.”

### Options for anchors (other than breath)

- the sense of gravity, or weight, on the cushion,
- sound
- visual objects

## Remember

1. Don't get involved in the content of our thoughts. If a thought comes up, we simply label it “thinking” and let it go.
2. Don't try to get rid of thoughts. The function of the mind is to produce thoughts. So, they're not really a problem. When a thought arises, we simply notice it, let it go, and gently return our attention to the breath.
3. We're not trying to create or cling to a particular mental state. We're relaxed and open, and free of any agenda.

## Keys to Success:

The first is **alertness, or vigilance**. This is the faculty that notices what our mind is doing. If we're alert or vigilant, we see thoughts as they arise, before they overwhelm us or carry us away.

The second key to success is **mindfulness, or recollection**. With mindfulness, we remember to remain present and apply the technique when a thought comes up.

So, alertness and mindfulness work hand in hand. First, we notice that a thought has come up. Then we remember to remain present and apply the technique.