

The Preparation for Contemplation

This is a description of the Preparation for Contemplation (PFC) that I introduced in *Dogzen: Cultivating Naked Awareness*. This is a good practice to focus awareness after long breaks in an Enlightenment Intensive, Zoom Dyad Retreat, or at any time you want to “return to the base” to help you deepen your contemplation.

Introduction

The Preparation for Contemplation is a subsidence type of meditation. Subsidence practices calm the nervous system so that the mind and emotions become steady and clear. This promotes a bright and open state that is good for contemplation.

This meditation instructs us about the base of pure awareness. You can directly know the base by being fully present as pure, empty awareness being aware of itself.

As with most guided meditations, the first times you try it might seem awkward, but after you do it a few times it will usually be quite easy and enjoyable and leave you in a wonderful open and focused state.

We do four short meditation practices in the PFC:

- Nekashum, a breathing exercise, followed by meditations on
- Stillness,
- Silence, and
- Non-conceptual mind

Each practice follows immediately after the previous one. You stay in the meditation as you move from one practice to the next.

We usually do these practices with our eyes closed, but you should do what seems best for you.

We try not to try too hard or force the mind to obey our will when doing the practices. We approach each practice in a relaxed frame of mind, careful to not stress about how well we do. It's more about discovering an essence and staying with it for a little while rather than making a strong experience or creating a breakthrough.

We don't do each section very long. Two to three minutes for each one is enough. The whole meditation lasts about fifteen minutes. If you do the optional parts, it can take a little longer, depending how long you do each part.

Sit in a comfortable meditation position, one that will keep your body from being a distraction. It is best if you sit up, with your back straight, and with your head balanced above your spine. Stay relaxed and attentive.

Here is an example of the PFC meditation:

Nekashum

The first practice is called Nekashum (*nee-kah-shoom*). It is a simple breathing exercise that helps you detach awareness from its involvement in the external world and settle in the central channel of the body.

On the in-breath, let your awareness ride the flow of breath into the central channel of the body. For our purposes, the central channel is anything that, to you, seems like the central channel. It is generally described as an energy channel that starts at your head, runs inside the body, parallel to the spine, and ends at the base of the spine.

On the out-breath, rest in the central channel. Remain within. Let the breath go out without your awareness going out with it. Have the exhale be longer than the inhale.

Breathe slowly and naturally. Just go in on the in-breath and rest within during the out-breath.

Do this at your own pace for a few minutes. Just go in and in and in.

Stillness

The next meditation is Stillness.

Look around in your inner field of awareness and find something that to you is stillness. Don't try to get a strong experience of stillness, or a perfect experience. Just get a little.

If you can't find any stillness, just imagine some stillness and use that. That works just as well.

If you are distracted by any movement, just understand that stillness is at the base and is sometimes obscured or covered-over by movement. Just reconnect with the stillness. Treat stillness as the base of your awareness.

This next part is optional:

Next, we will challenge your connection with the stillness a little. Move your arms gently a bit while staying in touch with the stillness.

While moving, stay in touch with the stillness, even in the face of the motion of your arms. Try not to let the movement obscure the underlying stillness.

If you lose track of the stillness, stop your physical movement and refocus.

Continue these motions as time permits. At the end, finish the movement and then just stay with the stillness.

If you lose touch with the stillness, reconnect with it and just continue. Avoid thoughts of self-judgement about how well you are doing.

Silence

The next meditation is silence.

Look around in your inner field of awareness and find something that to you is silence. Don't try to get a strong experience of silence, or a perfect experience of silence. Just get a little.

If you can't find any silence, just imagine some silence and use that. That works just as well.

Gently work with this for a few minutes. Become familiar with the silence that lies at the base of awareness.

If you are distracted by any sounds, just understand that silence is at the base and is sometimes obscured or covered-over by sounds. Just reconnect with the silence. Treat silence as the underlying base of awareness.

If you find yourself struggling to make the silence stronger, just give that up for now.

This next part is optional:

Now let's challenge your connection with the silence a little. We will say the syllable "Ah" while staying in touch with the silence. "Ah" is one of the simplest and gentlest sounds, so it is a good one for this practice.

Take a breath and say "Ahhhhhhhhh" while staying connected with the silence. Understand that silence is at the base and that sounds can sometimes obscure the base, hiding it from awareness.

Continue to chant "Ahhhhh" as time permits.

If you lose touch with the silence, reconnect with it and just continue. Avoid thoughts of self-judgement about how well you are doing.

Non-Conceptual Mind

The next meditation is non-conceptual mind.

Look around in your inner field of awareness and find something that to you is non-conceptual mind. This is how the mind is when it is not conceiving of something or thinking about something. Find what to you is non-conceptual mind.

Gently work with this for a few minutes. Become familiar with not conceiving of anything—just being present. Gently hold that state.

If you are distracted by any thoughts or concepts, understand that non-conceptual mind is at the base and is often obscured or covered-over by thoughts. Just reconnect with non-conceptual mind. Treat this as the natural base of your awareness.

Ending

That completes the meditation. As you finish, reconnect with the world slowly. See the room with fresh awareness. Notice if your state has changed and, if so, how it has changed. Don't be too hasty to re-engage with movement, sounds, and concepts. Take a minute or two to be nakedly aware, until the state loses its freshness naturally.

Note that if you are actually using this meditation as *preparation* for contemplation in a dyad, as opposed to just having a good meditation, you'll want to bring the sublime state into the dyad.

Dedication to all Beings

Traditionally, when you finish a meditation, you dedicate any improvement or benefit you got to everyone, to all sentient beings. This prevents you from becoming too self-centered. Also, it helps you realize that when you become clearer, others will benefit from that because they will find you easier to relate to. You won't be as big a problem to them.

If you wish, take a moment now to dedicate any improvement or benefit you got from this practice to all beings. Do this with an open heart.

Appendix A—More about Connecting with Stillness, Silence, and Non-conceptual Mind

Oftentimes, Buddhist sutras and other texts talk about “body, speech, and mind.” These are sometimes called the “three vajras” or the “three doors to enlightenment.” The three meditations in the PFC reflect these elements, as body relates to stillness, speech relates to silence, and mind relates to non-conceptual mind.

In the PFC, one makes contact with each of these elements. Most of the time, one just “finds” what to him or her is stillness, silence, or non-conceptual mind. However, one’s connection with these elements can be developed and a deeper awareness of them can be beneficial.

The various ways the participant can engage with stillness, silence and non-conceptual mind are summarized in the “Bön Nine-Fold Practice.” These are taken from the Oral Teachings of the Zhang Zhung (*Zhang Zhung Nyengyud*). I learned them from Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche. You can work with these practices to help you further develop contemplation.

1. **Avoiding Confusion and Distractions by Means of the Three Vows:** begin with the vows of not moving, not speaking and not thinking.
2. **Settling the Mind through the Three Releases:** actions are released into stillness, sounds are released into silence, and thoughts are released into the non-conceptual mind.
3. **Holding the Places of Awareness through the Three Methods of Letting Be:** not changing the body, speech or mind. Letting the actions be in stillness, letting the sounds be in silence, letting the thoughts be in the non- conceptual state.
4. **Cutting the Karmic Traces by the Three Non-Followings:** not following the activities of the body, not following the activities of the speech, not following the activities of the mind.
5. **Extending Familiarity through the Three Cords:** recognizing the experience of stillness, silence and the non-conceptual and prolonging them.
6. **The Three Protections or Hidings:** going deep within and hiding the actions of the body in stillness, hiding the sounds in silence, and hiding the thoughts in the non-conceptual state.
7. **Exercising Energy with the Three Arisings:** once you are established in stillness, silence and the non-conceptual state, allow manifestations to arise. Allow movements to arise while maintaining a connection to the stillness. Allow sound to arise while maintaining a connection to the silence. Allow thoughts to arise while maintaining a connection to the non-conceptual state.

8. **Entering into Non-Duality through the Three Liberations:** once you are able to allow the manifestations to arise while staying connected to the base, the three liberations come. Actions, speech and thought arise and naturally liberate into the natural state. You are connected more to the base than to an experience.
9. **Yielding the Measure of the Effect through the Three Non-Obscurations:** no activities of the body, speech or mind obscure the natural state. "Good" and "bad" experiences continue to arise but never disturb your abiding in the base.