

The six healing sounds in meditation

I've been exploring the healing sounds and the movement of the breath as a way of structuring my meditation and finding my natural presence. It's not a fixed template or formula but something I find I can use as a helpful focus when my mind gets restless. I use each one of the healing sounds to fit with the movement of the breath. If ever I feel that I am being drawn into feelings of anxiety or restlessness or even anger or fear about something that has happened or is going to happen then I'll note it, name it and make space around it before coming back to the calm steadying action of the breath. Gradually, imperceptibly I find myself resting in a healing equilibrium.

I use the first three sounds as a focus to link the three levels of the body - mind, heart and body. The second three sounds become more of a freer opening up into the space around me: a space of loving awareness. Sometimes I practise with just one of the sounds, sometimes all six. I usually say each sound first aloud and then to myself, being very conscious of the vibrations they make. After some time of practising, this way of meditating has become a spontaneous, wordless process. It's a paradox that it is both very difficult and very simple.

I hope this helps you as much as it has helped me.

Hsiu

Clarity, impeccability

Anger, irritability

Wood

Rising

Liver

The sound hsiu has a feeling of lightness, of rising energy like a young shoot in spring. Meditating in the early morning is like a clean, fresh way to start the day inspired by the rising energy of wood and the clarity of a new beginning each morning. I try to keep the meditation impeccable avoiding the muddy waters of thought. I watch the breath rising from the belly up into the head and then the out breath clearing out as though its sweeping out the inside of the head, cleaning away anger or irritation with impeccability.

Ho

Commitment, creative energy, vitality

Restlessness, depression

Fire

Circulating

Heart

When I sit down to meditate I try to do it with commitment, (with the same kind of commitment when I start the tai chi form) because if I'm not careful it can become a pretence or I think I'll just get this over and then jump up and get on with my day as though that were more important. I set my timer and I commit to meditating until the bowl rings. With **ho** I focus my breathing on the heart area as the chest expands and contracts - using that focus to stick with it by connecting to the vitality of my heartbeat.

Fu

Grounded, confident
Dispersed, anxious
Earth
Descending
Spleen

I often start my meditation by being very aware of sitting on the floor, being still on the earth. I feel grounded in my body and then I cultivate an emotional awareness of solidity, confidence, calm. I often get stressed and anxious and I feel that physically in my stomach so I find it helps if I breathe deep down and gather everything into the centre so that all that is dispersed, everything that makes me feel anxious becomes present in the downward breath. Breathing into the ground. It's as though I can offer the stress to the earth which seems to have the infinite ability to absorb everything. I follow the breath up from the stomach on the in breath and then down into the stomach staying there for the pause, focusing there before the breath rises again.

Hsi

Awareness, spaciousness
Sadness, grief
Air
Spreading
Lungs

The sound of **hsi** is open and spacious. The breath brings me straight to the present moment where I can give myself space, room to breathe. It's as though I can lose myself in that space, offer a spacious presence. My consciousness expands into space and thoughts evaporate. The space and the air are not mine - the function of breathing is mine but the breath is not, its part of the transformation process when my meditating body becomes limitless, boundless. I use this sound as the start of moving from a directed focus to a wider field of spatial awareness. As I breathe my breath covers and then spreads out from my body.

Ch'ui

Flexible, transformative
Fearful, rigid
Water
Flowing
Kidneys

The element is water and the breath is like skimming on the surface of a great expanse of water, spreading and flowing outward. Not holding on rigidly but letting go, not fixing but releasing, not stiffening or unbending but flowing and flexing. It's a beautiful opportunity to let the thought process flow away without getting caught up in its chain of content; to continue to open out to the vipassna, to a greater insight of being aware of everything that goes on around but experiencing it as a streaming flow of water that you can't grab or hold onto, a flow of breath that endlessly flows in and out of the body without ceasing.

Hey

Cohesion, wholeness, positive energy, concord, balance, consciousness
Incoherence, dispersal, negativity

The triple warmer

This is the ultimate transcendence of the mind in meditation. Those fleeting moments that catch you unawares when you are right there in your natural state of being. This is a universal connection, a coming together with all the sounds, all the elements, all the senses, with the environment, with the breath, the body, the meditator, the meditation. That all is noticed but nothing held onto. The meditation becomes the whole and the whole experience becomes the meditation and within that is the discovery that the meditation is simply the moment of coming back to where you started. For everything is a vital and constantly changing energy. Simply you and me here in the present moment.

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time*

TS Eliot The Four Quartets

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