

# The Nine Breaths

by Lama Tsultrim Allione

We begin with the nine purification breaths.

The nine breaths is a purification practice which replaces stale *prana* with wisdom prana. The prana--or *lung*, in Tibetan--is a very important piece of our constitution which refers to the movement of life force in the body. When stale prana is removed through this practice, the remaining prana is clear and pure and wisdom prana emerges. Thus, the nine breaths is a great additional benefit to any kind of practice.

While it is helpful to do the nine breaths before any meditation, they may also be used as a means of calming the body at any time, especially before bed and upon waking.

How to Do It:

A straight back is essential for the nine breaths. Full lotus position is ideal, though open posture is also acceptable. Open posture is sitting cross-legged with one foot in front of the other and the knees down. If the legs are stiff and the knees are way up, it will be difficult. Keep the chin tucked in, but not extremely tucked. The typical image is that of a shepherd's hook. The back of the head is like the rounded back of the shepherd's hook; the chin is in a bit.

Place the thumbs at the base of the ring fingers and make a fist. Press down on the top of the thighs with the backs of the hands--not the knuckles. The hands will bend inward; palms to the sky. Lock the elbows if possible. If long arms make this too difficult, slide the arms down the thighs until the elbows lock. Locking the elbows presses on the chest, thereby creating a container for the body. The hands on the thighs close a channel that goes down through the legs.

Raise the left hand, keeping the vajra fist and make one circle towards you with the index finger extended. Place the point of the left index finger into the base of the left nostril, closing it. Keep the elbow up as high as possible and the end palm facing forward. Exhale deeply through the right nostril. Return the left hand to its original position atop the left thigh; pressing down, elbows locked.

Do the same thing with the right hand, but this time closing the right nostril and exhaling through the left nostril.

Complete this motion three times on each side, alternating left / right / left / right / left / right, for a total of six breaths. Return to the original position with the back of the hands pressed on the thighs holding the vajra fist with both hands. Inhale slowly and steadily, then exhale slowly and smoothly both nostrils, dividing the exhalation into three parts. That is six breaths alternating the closing of one nostril, followed by one inhale with a single exhalation divided into three parts.

The nine breaths are accompanied by visualization. The visualization is similar for men and women, though reversed. Everyone begins raising the left arm and blocking the left nostril exhaling out of the right nostril.

#### WOMEN:

From the right nostril comes red current like a river, representing craving, grasping and desire, from the left nostril comes a white current, representing anger, aggression, aversion. The first exhalation this river is very dirty, the next exhalation it is clearer, and the final exhalation it is a clear.

#### MEN:

From the right nostril comes white current representing anger, hatred and aversion, from the left nostril comes red current representing craving, grasping and desire, the first exhalation this river is very dirty, the next exhalation it is clearer, and the final exhalation it is a clear.

#### BOTH MEN AND WOMEN:

Central Channel when you are pressing down on both thighs simultaneously a blue river flows out, which contains ignorance, delusion, befuddlement. In the three section of the one exhalation the first section is a very dirty polluted blue, the second clearer and the third is clear blue.

#### Inhalation

During inhalation, one should visualize the essence of the five elements as the five luminous lights which are the five wisdoms. The index finger, as it makes the circling motion on its way up to the nostril, is hooking that rainbow light and bringing it in.

Remember that rainbow light comes in with each inhale. Unlike the exhalations, which get lighter each time, the inhalations are consistently rainbow light.

Upon completion of the nine breaths, place the hands flat, palms down, on the knees. Rest a few moments. This is called resting in the wisdom prana. This step should not be overlooked. Do not abruptly end the nine breaths and then rush on to begin the meditation practice. Allow the space of a few resting breaths in the wisdom prana.

There is an additional visualization that may be added after we become comfortable with the nine breaths. It is similar to the Feeding Your Demons practice. In this, as we do the exhalations of each of the nine breaths, we see below and slightly in front all of the challenging, difficult people--karmic debtors, enemies, and so on. We see all the people we have karma with, as well as the Lord of Death. The Lord of Death is

like a wrathful, fierce bull with his mouth wide open. Death is the greatest enemies because it takes from us the possibility of becoming liberated.

The Lord of Death is our own death, waiting for us. As the currents come out of our nostrils during exhalation, it goes down toward these karmic debtors and enemies and the Lord of Death. As it reaches their lips it turns into nectar. This nectar satisfies their desires. The karmic debts that we have with those people are satisfied, and the Lord of Death is satisfied. With each breath, our challengers become more and more satisfied. Finally at the end they are completely satisfied. The earth closes up, and the body and mind are completely purified. Finish by resting in the wisdom prana.

This is the purification of the nine breaths.

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