

## *Meditation Tips for The First Gate*

When practicing meditation, it's important to understand what we are truly training for. At its core, meditation is about cultivating one essential skill: focus.

The more we train, the stronger our ability to focus becomes. But what does it really mean to have a high level of focus? How do we recognize it, and how do we know it's improving over time? Let's begin by exploring what focus truly is.

Focus is the act of directing our awareness toward a single object.

In the meditation process, we start with simple instructions:

- Gradually relax your face.
- Close your eyes and slowly relax your eyeballs, keeping them still.
- Lower your tongue and keep it still.

At this point, we begin to focus, even if only for a brief moment—just a few seconds. This focus extends to each part of the body: the hands, abdomen, chest, thighs, and more. These small moments of awareness accumulate, and as we listen to and follow the instructions, we notice something profound: our minds stop wandering. The chaotic thoughts settle.

This simple act of listening and following guidance is the first step toward focus. By continuously concentrating on different parts of the body, we start transforming a scattered mind into an attentive awareness. At first, this awareness is fleeting—lasting just 20 to 30 seconds. But with practice, it grows: a minute, five minutes, ten minutes, even hours of sustained focus. This is meditative focus, and it doesn't happen overnight. It requires dedication and repeated practice.

However, as we practice, something remarkable begins to unfold. We are guided to “sit and feel the stillness.” In that moment, you might feel truly still—but just as quickly, you realize your focus has slipped away. And so, the question arises: how do we maintain focus?

## **The Heart Center: The Key to Focus**

To maintain focus, direct your attention to the heart center—the midpoint of the sternum. This practice, often referred to in Buddhism as “to dwell,” involves gently anchoring your awareness at a single point without force or rigidity. In English, we call it “to dwell”; in Vietnamese, it’s “trụ”; and in Chinese, it is also “trụ.”

The essence of “to dwell” is to stay lightly attached to the heart center—calm, steady, and free from overthinking. It’s not about suppressing thoughts or emotions but allowing them to come and go without disrupting your focus.

## **The Nature of Dwell**

“Dwell” means softly attaching your awareness to the heart center, the spot in the middle of your chest. This attachment is gentle, not heavy or strained. Even if thoughts arise, they don’t disrupt this light connection. The problem isn’t that focus is lost—it’s that we chase after thoughts, emotions, or sensations, letting our attention wander. But focus itself is never destroyed; it is always present within the nature of the True Mind.

So how do we activate focus?

By systematically relaxing the body and directing attention step by step:

- Start with the eyes, then move to the tongue, shoulders, hands, back, chest, and so on.
- After this relaxation, return to the heart center.

Anchor your awareness there, and as thoughts or emotions come and go, let them pass without following them. This process leads to a profound stillness—a state where your body and mind settle into immovable tranquility.

## **From Dwell to Stillness**

As you continue to focus on the heart center, breathing lightly and allowing your awareness to rest there, you'll notice a transformation. Your entire being will feel settled, sinking into an extraordinary stillness. In this state, your body and mind become deeply anchored, and your awareness remains steady and centered.

This is the natural progression of focus into stillness. It is a profound sense of inner peace and stability. The key is to stay lightly connected to the heart center, breathing naturally and effortlessly.

## **The First Gate**

This practice—focusing on the heart center, breathing lightly, and experiencing stillness—is the gateway to the spiritual path. It is the foundation of stability and mindfulness, where the mind ceases to wander and finds a tranquil anchor. Through consistent practice, this technique deepens, leading to a profound state of stillness.

## **In Summary**

1. **Activate Focus:** Follow the meditation guidance, relaxing each part of the body step by step, from head to toe.
2. **Develop Sustained Focus:** Anchor your awareness at the heart center. Focus gently, allowing thoughts and emotions to pass without following them. Feel the stillness of your body.

Through this simple but profound practice, you'll begin to experience a state of deep stillness and clarity, paving the way for lasting inner peace.