

# Trataka “Gazing Meditation”

Trataka or steady gazing is a concentration exercise. It involves alternately gazing at an object or point of focus without blinking, then closing your eyes and continuing to hold the visual of the object in your mind's eye. This practice is excellent for increasing your ability to be more attentive in everything you do. It steadies the wandering mind which is what the practices of meditation are all about; to focus so attentively that the technique becomes the experience, one pointed concentration. With Trataka the eyes hold the image in the mind. The technique can be used as mental hygiene, to clear the mind or it can be more meaningful by staring at an object of particular importance. The more you focus on something the better you understand it; it's like learning. If something is of great importance to you, you will become more intimate with it just by continually focusing on it. The yogis used this technique to be "one" with the gods; staring at Shiva or Krishna and them holding "his" image in their mind for long periods at a time; eventually their mind and the lord were one and the same. If you focus on something long enough you embody it; like if you constantly think something bad (or good) will happen, then it does. Using Trataka Meditation there is an emergence with the object of perception. All meditation practices are wonderful and we are all at different stages in our practices, recognize that the first step is to learn to be in relationship with the mind, then learn how to focus (still) it so that we can recognize the difference between what is real and what is imaginary (consciousness or mind). The Yoga Sutras summarize the end result as "when the practice matures there becomes a spontaneous unfolding of unclouded truth; the final transformation where consciousness remains forever established in its own absolute nature". Trataka is primarily used for strengthening your ability to concentrate and to purify the mind, but it also improves eyesight and stimulates the brain via the optic nerve. It is one of the six purification practices called Kriyas.

To practicing Trataka you can use a variety of objects for your intended focus. To keep it simple (for clearing and focusing the mind), a candle works wonderfully, or mark a black dot on a piece of paper and attach it to the wall (black against white is best). For more variety you can use a picture of someone special, a symbol such as OM, a yantra (geometrical diagrams), or at the image of a deity. You can also use something in nature (outside) like a flower or the moon; avoid complicated things like a tree because it is hard to hold all the details and you will get frustrated; simple is best. Consider that whatever you choose will have an association to past mental labels and memories (name, form and so on) with specific significance to you. As long as the object is not moving and can be viewed in its entirety it will produce the desired results. In some yogic practices the gazed (drishti) or point of focus is the space between the eyebrows, the tip of the nose or the Heart Chakra.

To practice Trataka, place the chosen object so that it can be seen clearly (unless outdoors) at about eye level about three feet away from you. Start with regulating your breath (deeper and slower), when you are relaxed begin to gaze at the object without blinking (without straining), and after about a minute, close your eyes, keep your inner gaze steady and visualize the object in your mind (Ajna, third eye chakra). When the image loses its crispness in your mind's eye or you begin to forget what it looks like, open your eyes again and repeat the gazing. You may experience the eyes watering (all very natural) before you can really hold the visual impression

in the optic sensors, simply close your eyes for a short time and start again. Gradually you will be able to extend the time you can hold the memory of the object in your mind (burn the image into your mind) and you won't need to stare for as long. With a lot of practice you will be able to see the image without viewing it first; it will remain forever in your mind. For the serious practitioners (like yogis) they want to forever be with their God, seeing only "him", worshipping "him" in everything they do; the object and the experience are one. As your concentration grows and your mind becomes steadier, you will be able to extend the amount of time you practice. Like any meditation practice it is best to start with easily attainable lengths of time and work up to 10, 20 or 30 minutes. At first you will be challenged by just 5 minutes. Gradually increase the time you spend at a rate that is comfortable for you; too much too soon and you will give up completely out of frustration.

This is a wonderful practice and can be done anywhere. A few minutes a day and you will think clearer, have better memory, sleep better, be more relaxed and feel more fully alive.

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