

RELIGHTING YOUR FIRE

Give candle gazing a try

All meditation methods are effective in reducing stress, but they do so in different ways. One simple approach is a self-guided practice called candle gazing.

Sometimes referred to as trataka, the Sanscrit word means “to look,” or “to gaze.” Most meditation is done with your eyes closed, focusing attention inward, but this technique involves staring at a single point of focus. Ideally, the focal point is the flame of a candle, but other objects may be used. These include a white point on black paper or a black point on white, an object of worship, a flower, the rising sun or moon.

How does it work?

When you think, your eyes move rapidly. By stopping this movement, trataka slows down—or even pauses—the thought processes, allowing your mind to become calm.

Candle gazing is best practiced first thing in the morning or last thing in the evening before going to sleep. Try experimenting with your candle gazing practice to see what works for you.



A FEW BENEFITS OF CANDLE GAZING

Because this meditation is done with the eyes open, it's a great option for people who have trouble containing their wandering mind. By concentrating on a physical object, it can be easier to stay focused. Candle gazing is also said to help:

- Diminish insomnia
- Relieve anxiety and depression
- Strengthen the muscles around the eyes
- Clear the mind and improve concentration

Caution: This practice is not suitable for people with certain conditions. If you have a tendency towards Schizophrenia or hallucinations or have epilepsy you should not practice trataka.

HOW TO ENJOY THE BENEFITS OF CANDLE GAZING

Avoid any candles that contain toxic substances. Soy wax or beeswax candles are non-toxic and have a longer burning time.

Choose a quiet, darkened and draft-free space where you will not be disturbed. Dim light is best for candle gazing, so close the curtains or blinds, remove distractions and silence your phone.

1. **Select a level surface for your candle.** Be sure it's free of flammable materials, and set it at or near eye level when you are seated. Place the candle on the surface and light it.
2. **Wear comfy clothing and be sure the room is a comfortable temperature.** (If it's chilly, a shawl around your shoulders is nice.)
3. **Sit straight, but comfortably,** on a chair, the floor, or a pillow or cushion so the candle flame is at eye level and about two feet away.
4. **Stare at the candle** and allow it to become the main focus of your mind. Keep your eyes fixed, even if you feel bored or distracted. Your eyes may begin to water, but hold steady—the sensation will pass. If you blink or get distracted, simply return your attention to the flame.
5. **Keep your gaze anchored on some part of the flame,** rather than the candle or wick.
6. **Focus on the sensation of the light flowing into you with each inhalation.** As time passes, the room around you will fade until your only awareness is the flame.
7. **When your meditation is done, lay down and close your eyes for a few minutes.** Allow your mind and body to come back to full awareness.

Your practice time should be built gradually. It can be a little tricky to stay focused on a candle without your eyes blinking or watering. But—with a little practice—most people gradually become very comfortable with this type of open-eye meditation.