

Relaxing the tongue

This article is an introductory summary of the teachings of Zen Master Thích Thông Triệt on the topic, mainly based on the oral teaching of Bhikkhuni Zen Master Thích Nữ Triệt Như given for the Fundamental Meditation Course. For a comprehensive in-depth understanding, the reader is encouraged to attend the complete nine-seminar teaching program and read the writings of Master Thích Thông Triệt that are being progressively translated into English.

Why practice relaxing the tongue?

The tongue is an important part of the language formation process, and acting upon the tongue has the effect of inhibiting the language formation process, resulting in stopping the inner verbal talk.

Practice steps

First we *withdraw the tongue a little and relax it* so that it stays naturally inside the mouth cavity and is not pointing towards the roof of the mouth.

Some meditation techniques teach that, in order to stop our thoughts and inner talk, we should point the tongue towards the roof of the mouth. However, when we curl the tongue up in this way, we need to *exert an intention* to do so. This results in an effort that will activate the sympathetic nervous system.

When we practice this technique, we withdraw the tip of the tongue a little and relax it. In so doing, the tongue rests naturally inside the mouth cavity without touching anything, neither the teeth nor the bottom of the mouth cavity.

When we practice relaxing the tongue, we just *keep the awareness that "I am relaxing the tongue"*. The result is that there are no wandering thoughts.

We can practice sitting on a chair, however we should sit like we sit in meditation, with our back straight, our head straight, our body relaxed and our eyes half-closed looking down at a spot about two to three hand spans in front of us. One way to ensure that the back is straight is to have the two ears above the shoulders, and one way to keep the head straight is to have the tip of the nose aligned with the navel. When we keep our eyes half-closed looking at a spot in front of us, we avoid the problem of tiring the eyes (which occurs if we keep the eyes wide open) and the problem of feeling sleepy (which occurs if we keep the eyes closed). The posture with the back straight, the head straight, the body relaxed and the eyes half-closed looking at a spot about two to three hand spans in front of us is also the sitting meditation posture.

We keep one hand on top of the other, the two arms relaxed and the thumbs touching each other. We remove our spectacles. We keep our lips naturally closed and our teeth slightly open, not clenched.

A sign that we are practicing correctly is the secretion of saliva. Saliva is secreted as a result of the parasympathetic system being activated. This system connects with many glands inside the body, including the saliva producing glands. However, if we practice incorrectly, or if we are angry, anguished or sad, the sympathetic nervous system is activated and inhibits saliva secretion, which results in a dry mouth.

We can start with practicing for five minutes, however better results will be achieved if we practice for 15 – 20 minutes. We may practice several times a day, in the morning, at midday and before bed.

Effect of practice

Our decision to start practicing meditation is a sign that our intellect has been awakened.

When we practice the relaxing-the-tongue technique, we have an intention "*to relax*" at the same time as we *maintain our awareness*. As a result, thoughts that agitate our mind are quietened down and our wordless awareness is activated. Our wordless awareness operates from the left rear hemisphere of the brain and consists of ultimate seeing, ultimate hearing, ultimate touch and ultimate cognition. In the instance of practicing relaxing the tongue, we activate ultimate touch. Please refer to the article "The Three Aspects of Knowing" for more details.

When we practice relaxing the tongue, the stimulus initiated by the tongue first reaches ultimate touch, and then is transmitted to the limbic system inside the brain. There, it activates the hypothalamus, which, in turn, activates the parasympathetic nervous system, if we practice correctly. The parasympathetic nervous system then secretes the biochemical acetylcholine at its extremities. Acetylcholine has the effect of regulating our blood pressure and the cholesterol and sugar blood levels, and helps improve memory. The hypothalamus also activates the endocrine system that regulates the function of our inner organs such as the liver, heart, stomach and digestive system. Please refer to the article "The

biofeedback process in meditation” for more details.

In summary, practicing relaxing the tongue will result in a quiet mind in which there are no wandering or anxious thoughts. We feel our mind at peace and feel light and relaxed. As a consequence, we feel less angry, irritated, tense, sorrowful and discouraged. If we practice regularly, our physical health will improve, our blood pressure will be under control and our psychosomatic illnesses will be reduced.

