

Gatha Meditation and Making Your Own Gatha Cards¹

As part of our carrying practice, we often mention making small reminder cards to put in places you rest or work. These small reminders can sometimes be in the form of brief poems.

- You can make gathas—little verses for any activity.
- They provide a focus point for the mind, using the thinking mind to direct our attention to practice in the moment of reading or reciting the gatha.
- You can do formal meditation with gathas. If you do that
 - Sit or lie down.
 - If Refuge and Bodhicitta are part of your practice, do them. If not, skip to the next step.
 - Recite the gatha.
 - Now, rest your mind on the first few words of the gatha.
 - Stay connected with the experience of breathing. You can even time to recitation of a word on an in-breath, or out-breath.
 - Then rest in open awareness.
 - After some time, switch to the next word(s) in the gatha.
 - If you get distracted, return to the experience of breathing and rest till the distraction is done and then return to Gatha practice as before. Be gentle.
 - When you are done, dedicate the goodness of the meditation to the awakening of all beings.

Another way to do gatha practice is to create small reminder cards with a practice you are carrying, like patience. Place the cards where you will see them throughout the day. The cards can be gathas (small poem-reminders like, “As I stack these dishes, I increase my patience.”) or just words (patience) or phrases (I breathe out patience.)

Children make gathas or reminder cards, too. They work better if there are not too many words. This engages the thinking mind less and lets us get right to the practice itself.

Here is a little gatha, by Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh

Brushing my teeth and rinsing my mouth,
I vow to speak purely and lovingly.
When my mouth is fragrant with right speech,
a flower blooms in the garden of my heart.

¹ This handout made by Lama Lekshe for the students practicing Gathas. In contemporary Buddhist practice as popularized (and derived from the Zen and Theravadin traditions) by Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, a *gatha* is a verse recited (usually mentally, not aloud) in rhythm with the breath as part of mindfulness practice, either in daily life or as part of meditation or meditative study. Gatha in Sanskrit means ‘song’ or ‘verse.’