
Noticing the Pause...

How often do you pause throughout your day?

There's so much hurry in the world, and we are often dragged along at a pace that's faster than we want to go. All too often we move from one thing to the next without stopping or thinking, and before we know it the day has rushed past in a blur of busyness and doing.

Yet there is a constant gentleness beneath all of this - the smooth and steady stream of your breath.

There is each inbreath, and each outbreath.

And within this steady flow, there is a tiny moment. A natural transition as the breath changes direction.

And that transition brings a natural and very subtle pause.

This pause can be brief and fleeting, or it can be spacious and expansive.

The pause might even arise and expand spontaneously.

You can use this pause as a simple and natural focus for your concentration (dharana) practice.

How might this be helpful off the mat?

By simply noticing the pauses within the breath, we get the opportunity to press pause in our busy mind. We can take a moment to get off the hamster wheel! In doing so, we create mini moments of calm in our day.

As we become more accustomed to noticing the pause, we can gradually find that we are less reactive to situations that would once have affected us. This is empowering! We are not at the whim of all that's going on around us, or the whirring thoughts and reactions within our mind. Instead we can notice, pause, and choose – making choices that are softer, kinder, more helpful, and more expansive.

*“Between stimulus and response there is a space.
In that space is our power to choose our response.
In our response lies our growth and freedom”*

Viktor Frankl (Holocaust survivor, Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist).

The Practise:

This practice can be done seated, standing or lying down. There are a several optional 'layers' included in the practice below – choose all, or whichever is most suitable for you.

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- Settle into your chosen posture, with your eyes either softly open or closed. Relax your jaw and shoulders.
 - Become aware that you're breathing.
 - Receive the inhale: let it flow in
 - Release the exhale: let it flow out

There is no sense of doing – let the breath come to you, and let it dissolve...

- Feel the place where each inbreath arrives.

That might be your nostrils, or perhaps it's beyond that - maybe you sense the breath begins beyond your nostrils.

- Watch your outbreath dissolve into the distance – notice how far it travels

Continue observing the inbreath and outbreath for for 5 – 10 rounds

- Notice the top of your inhale – a subtle pause. Then, as if by magic, the exhale appears
- Notice the bottom of the exhale – a subtle pause. Then, as if by magic, the inhale appears

Know that these pauses exist within you – soft, spacious, light, expansive

- Continue sensing the pause for 5 – 10 rounds
- Optional layer: visualising the breath

As your breath continues to flow, drop your awareness to the base of your spine.

- Follow your inbreath to the crown of your head. Pause
- Follow your outbreath to the base of your spine. Pause.

Continue for 5 – 10 rounds

- Optional layer: drop a soft, inner 'Om' into each pause
 - Inhale to the crown of your head... "Om"
 - Exhale to the base of your spine..."Om"

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- Continue for 5 – 10 rounds
 - Release the “Om”
 - Optional layer: *feeling* the pause
 - Place your hands on the warmth of your belly
 - Feel the inbreath rise – the pause appears
 - Feel the outbreath release – the pause appears
 - Continue for 5 – 10 rounds...
 - Close the practice:
 - Receive a deep full inhale, and release a full exhale
 - Notice where your body makes contact with your mat/chair
 - Turn your head side to side, take a simple stretch, rub your hands and place your warm palms softly over your eyes.
 - When you are ready, open your eyes. Fully present – here – now.

Reflections:

What did you notice? You may wish to journal any observations or insights that arise during or after your practice.

The following journal prompts may also be useful...

- What does the natural pause in the breath feel like for me?
- Where are there natural moments of transition in my day? Small pockets of time where I can pause and breathe?
- How does it feel to let go of ‘doing’? Does pausing feel uncomfortable or unnatural for me?

Taking your practice off the mat...

- Notice the natural transitions in your day. Are you tempted to fill each and every one of them? Could you take a few moments to notice the natural pauses in your breath?
- Can you notice when you’re about to react (or perhaps you’re already in reaction-mode)? Is it helpful and appropriate, or is there another way to respond to the situation?

Points to Consider...

- Aparigraha (non-grasping): Avoid grasping in search of the pause, or gripping on to it once you discover it.
- It's not holding your breath – the pause comes and goes naturally. But, you might find that the pause expands – if so then let yourself go with that.
- Ahimsa (non-harm): if this practice causes any anxiety or discomfort let it go. Simply be aware that you are breathing.
- If you feel out of breath you are possibly 'forcing' the pause – all you need to do is notice, you're not trying to change, shape or hold the breath.