

The Importance of Breath Awareness
by
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(from *The Art of Mindful Living* – Part One)

Tonight I will give instructions on breathing. It's so important! If you don't know how to practice breathing, then it will be difficult to follow the retreat.

The first exercise is "In and Out." Breathing in, I know that I am breathing in; breathing out, I know that I am breathing out. This is a *very* important practice. When you breathe in, you know that this is your in-breath and not your out-breath. You identify your in-breath as in-breath. And when you breathe out, you know that this is your out-breath. Only that! But it is a *very* important practice! This is the first exercise on breathing that the Buddha gives to us.

When you practice like that, something wonderful happens: we stop the thinking – and this is a miracle already – because in our daily life we think too much. And because we think too much, we are not truly ourselves. Our body might be here, but our mind may be elsewhere – in the past, in the future. And therefore, when you breathe in and out, and become aware of the in-breath and out-breath, you stop the thinking and you begin to be where your body is.

Our body and our minds are very often separated from each other. And if we practice breathing in and out with some concentration, we attain what we call the oneness of body and mind. Your mind and your body are unified, and you begin to be there – truly yourself. And this is the first fruit of your practice. And it requires you to breathe in and out consciously, being aware of your in-breath and your out-breath.

When you are not there, when you are not really there, you cannot see things very clearly and deeply. You miss everything. Everything seems to you not clear, vague. Suppose your mother is sitting there, but only her physical body is sitting there and her mind is somewhere else. If at that time you want to come and get some attention from your mother, some affection, well, you will not be successful because she is not really there, she is not available to you. And that happens very often. But we *are there* by breathing in and out – breathing in and breathing out. And we begin to be alive – to be present.

And this is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness means to be aware of what is going on. Your child is coming and she wants some attention, some affection. You know that, so you smile to her. You might open your arms and hug her. And the basic condition is that you *are there*. So to breathe in and out is to be really *there* and to be available. To whom? Available to your beloved ones – and also *to begin to encounter life* – because life can be found only in the present moment.

Let us think a little bit. The beautiful blue sky – when can you get in touch with the blue sky? The present moment! In order not to miss the blue sky, you have to go back to the present moment because it *is in that* moment that you can get in touch with the blue sky. The beautiful rivers, the beautiful trees, your mother, your father – they are all in the present moment. And if you go back to the present moment, you encounter them.

Everything wonderful, everything refreshing, they *are* in the present moment. Therefore, running to the future or getting lost in the past, you miss life.

And therefore by breathing in and out, you get back to the present moment where you have an appointment with life.

What you are looking for in life – like happiness, joy – they are all in the present moment. The Pure Land of the Buddhists must be found in the present moment. The Kingdom of Heaven of the Catholics and of the Protestants should also be found the present moment.

Look at a Tree. A wonderful thing is a tree. A tree is very beautiful. A tree to me is as beautiful as a cathedral – even more beautiful! I look into a tree and I see the whole cosmos in it. I see the sunshine in the tree. Can you see the sunshine? Yes, because without the sunshine no tree can grow. I see a cloud in the tree. Can you see? Without a cloud there can be no rain and, therefore, no tree. I see the earth in the tree. I see everything in the tree. So the tree is where everything in the cosmos comes into, and the cosmos reveals itself to me in a tree. Therefore a tree to me is like a cathedral, and I can take refuge in the tree, and I can get nourished by the tree.

The tree belongs to the Kingdom of God. The tree belongs to the Pure Land. And I can get in touch with the tree only if I go back to the present moment because the tree can only be found in the present moment. And that is why breathing in and out is so important.

*Yesterday is History,
Tomorrow is a Mystery,
Today is a Gift,
That's why it's called the Present.*

Our true home is in the present moment. To live in the present moment is a miracle. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on the green earth in the present moment – to appreciate the peace and the beauty that are available now. Peace is all around us, in the world and in nature, and within us – in our bodies and our spirits. Once we learn to touch this peace, we will be healed and transformed. It is not a matter of faith; it is a matter of practice.

(Thich Nhat Hanh)

When you are present in this moment, you break the continuity of your story, of past and future. Then true intelligence arises, and also love. The only way love can come into your life is not through form, but through that inner spaciousness that is Presence. Love has no form.

(Eckhart Tolle)

"These roses under my window make no reference to former roses or to better ones; they are for what they are; they exist with God today. There is no time to them. There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence. Before a leaf-bud has burst, its whole life acts; in the full-blown flower there is no more; in the leafless root there is no less. Its nature is satisfied and it satisfies nature in all moments alike. But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time."

(Ralph Waldo Emerson)

In the now is all time, and to understand the now is to be free of time.
Becoming is the continuation of time, of sorrow.
Becoming does not contain being.
Being is always in the present, and being is the highest form of transformation.

(Krishnamurti)

No longer forward nor behind
I look in hope or fear;
But, grateful, take the good I find,
The best of now and here.

(Whittier)

Live each moment completely and the future will take care of itself.
Fully enjoy the work and beauty of each instant.

(Yogananda)

We think that past and future are real because the mind keeps brooding over what we have done and what others have done to us, what we will do and what others will do to us. But it is not past and future that are real; it is our brooding on the past and the future that is real. If we could withdraw our attention from these will-o'-the-wisps, many of our problems would simply dissolve. As our meditation deepens, we develop the ability to withdraw our attention more and more from the past and the future to focus it on the present. And as we begin to live more and more in the present, we make the exhilarating discovery that past and future exist only in our minds. It is a tremendous realization, for it means that we are released from any burden of guilt about the past and any anxiety about the future. Every moment is unique and discrete. When our concentration is complete, we rest completely in the present. Then we do not live in time; we live in eternity.

(Eknath Easwaran)

Meditation is the technique of knowing how to be in the present moment.

(Ammachi)

To be really focused on God is to be fully and absolutely in the present moment, forgetting the past and the future. That alone is real prayer.

(Ammachi)