

Focus Practice 5: Mindful Pauses in the Day

What is the purpose of a Focus Practice?

The intention of a Focus Practice is to develop the “mini-muscles” needed to live in the New Way (NW) of the Minimalist Desert Pioneer.

Which muscles will this practice develop?

Breathing is something that is continuously occurring whether we are aware of it or not. Often, we are thinking about what has already happened or what is ahead of us but what about now? Are we present for what is going on in this moment? In this moment? Paying attention to our breathing helps us bring our attention to the present.

This purpose of this practice is to take a number of pauses throughout your day and simply pay attention to your breath as you breathe. While this practice is certainly cultivating your capability to be present, an equally and perhaps even more important capability is being developed which is called, ‘returning to’. For there are many, many occasions where your mind will drift, and it is in your becoming aware of this that you then have the opportunity to return your attention to your breath, to this moment. Hence, many people call this practice the practice of ‘returning’. It is designed to support learning objective #3 which is: *“to more fully know what are my own essentials in the fray.”*

While this practice can seem simple, it can turn out to be challenging. It can feel like you aren’t doing something and that you should. It can feel like it’s not getting you anywhere, that you aren’t making any ‘progress’ or that you need to get on to the next task. These are expressions of your longstanding criteria that keep your sense of ‘you’ and what’s important to ‘you’ intact. In any new practice that you try doing there will be an automatic application of these criteria to gauge ‘how you are doing’. So, when you engage in this practice, you are actually engaging in something that is counter to and does not fulfill your longstanding criteria that let you know how you are doing. You are not looking ahead, you are looking here, you are not doing something that will ‘get you somewhere’, you are doing something that brings you here. Using your longstanding criteria to gauge how you are doing will not readily support you and instead will frustrate you. Instead... as your longstanding criteria arises, start relating to them not from a place of needing to fulfill them but rather that their unfulfilled presence is an indicator that you are ‘on track’...as you are being in the present.... As your focus is ‘here’.... As you return your attention to the present. This way you get to draw upon the presence of your longstanding criteria to let you know you are on the right track...as you practice being in and returning to the present. So, try it out and see what happens.

This practice takes only a minute or less to do. Please do this practice multiple times in your day over the next two weeks following these guidelines.

What

- For one minute at each of the times below, pause in whatever you are doing so that there is no action in your body except for the gentle movement of your chest and belly moving in the rhythm of your breath.
- Set your timer for one minute, gently close your eyes, and focus on your breath. If at any time, a thought arises that is not about your breath, lovingly say to yourself, ‘returning to my breath’.
- When your one minute is over, gently open your eyes and resume your task.

Where & When

- Start this practice in the morning, while you are still in bed and end this practice when you take your time at night to review your practice and write in your journal.
- Also do this practice when you arrive at work, or go on an errand and make this something you do just before your return back home from being out.
- Then during the evening, please do this practice before and after mealtime.

Daily Journaling Questions

As noted above, before you start your journaling, begin with one minute focusing on your breath. Once complete, pick up your pen and respond to the following questions:

1. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the hardest, how hard was it to set aside these one-minute focused breathing times?
2. What kind of voice emerges as you work at focusing on your breath?
3. What kinds of minor shifts are you noticing about your attention after your breath focus?

Weekly Questions

Before reviewing your journal, please take one minute to focus on your breath. As you pick up your journal, take a slow, full breath. As you open your journal, slowly exhale. Begin reading and as you read, take moments to notice the quality of your breath. Once you've reviewed your journal, please take 15 minutes to respond to the following questions.

1. How has your anticipation of this practice changed over two weeks?
2. How has this regular practice affected your attention at work?
3. What are you "returning to" in you?