

Sacred Pause

Pauses are important. I just finished a four-week pause for personal retreat. Purposefully taking myself out of the constant stream of busyness has become a regular and welcome part of my yearly schedule. This pause gives me the opportunity to suspend activity, stop moving toward a goal. And then, something almost magical happens – presence in the moment, attentiveness, and stillness.

The fast pace of modern life isn't always conducive to the pause. Yet, that may be all the more reason to cultivate skillful pausing; to give an opportunity, a chance to breathe, and reconnect with the moment and ourselves.

From the dictionary: pause – to cease action temporarily; to dwell or linger, rest; a momentary cessation in music for the sake of meaning or expression.

I like the definition of a pause in music for the sake of meaning. Action, especially continuous action without a pause, does not give us a chance to feel, find, understand the meaning associated with the action. It is the pause, or the rest, the temporary stop, which helps illuminate the action both before and after. This is as true in our daily lives as it is in music.

The example of my personal retreat is a pause on a large, yearly scale. A pause can also be an instant, an hour, or a day. A pause may occur in the midst of a conversation or while writing an email. It may occur at work, at home, in nature or stuck in traffic. During a pause, we simply discontinue whatever we are doing and focus on being. You might try it now. Take a moment to stop reading, sit and do 'no thing.' Simply notice your current experience. I'll even leave a space here as encouragement.



A pause is limited, and then we return to doing. How we are as we return to doing may shift. Which leaves an opening for how or what we 'do' next to also shift. Our approach may change from a limited time of 'not doing' – a pause.

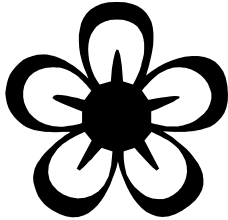
The moment of a pause gives us an opportunity to experience what is going on underneath the story or our current doing. I may be driving a carload of children to soccer practice, but there might be another experience underneath that story. Without time to pause, following the daily habits of our life, we begin to identify our self as our doing. 'I am a parent/driver/chauffer of future soccer stars.' However, almost inevitably, there come moments in our lives when defining our self as our 'doing' is unsatisfying. It may be subtle, a little tickle or itch, hardly identifiable.. Or it may come crashing down on us like a truckload of bricks. These are times when a judicious pause gives us the opportunity to feel more of our self beyond the current 'doing' story.

Pausing takes practice, again and again. It is a skill like any other. The more we practice in many different situations, the better skill and benefits are available. Sometimes we pause spontaneously – walking, showering, driving, in the moments before sleep. We

may also purposefully pause – after a phone conversation, reading a letter, when the garden weeding is done (finally!). I believe pauses are essential for body, mind, spirit, balance and health. Without conscious pausing, our body or mind, or spirit may demand a pause. This might occur as lying sick in bed with a cold; an injury that forces us to stop; or an emotional episode that eclipses everything else in our lives. If approached with attention and compassion, these pauses can point us toward a healthier life in better balance. Unfortunately, all too often, we can also ignore the body's request for a pause, or approach it as an irritating inconvenience to be fixed so we may return to our 'doing.'

When does a pause become sacred?

When it illuminates our experience, bringing meaning, clarity and freshness. The stillness of a pause, like the stillness of a pool of water, can reflect the genuine, whole, true nature of our selves and our lives.



During a pause we are paying attention and making room for the experiences of life, constantly flowing through and habitually overlooked through 'doing.' Reconnecting with just this moment, gives us a chance to let go of the doing and feel fully the being of human being.

Pause Awareness

We can bring more awareness to the pauses in our lives in many ways.

First, without changing anything, try noticing when you naturally pause during your daily activities. Notice the timing, length, and context of these natural pauses. What encourages or discourages these natural moments?

Second, try to create a conscious pause. Find a time during a goal-oriented activity – reading, computer work, cleaning, eating – and explore pausing for a moment or two. You may begin by discontinuing the activity and be motionless – sitting or standing. Allow your eyes to relax and close. Take a few deep breaths and with each exhale let go of any perceived tension in body or mind. Especially let go of thoughts about what you are going to do next.

- **As the internal environment quiets and clears, what do you notice?**
- **What sensations arise from your body or mind?**
- **What do you feel, hear, and see as you pause?**
- **In just this moment, what is your experience?**

You may weave a pause into your life in whatever way appeals to you. Make it fit your schedule and interest. Experiment by choosing different times and activities. Each time, just notice the experience and also any changes as you return to activity.



Inspiration from *Radical Acceptance* by Tara Brach

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