



# MISSING THE OBVIOUS



What does it take for us to see what's happening right in front of us?

When we're really busy focusing on the task in hand and an endless to-do list we tend to flick the efficiency switch and get our head down to plough through what really needs to be done.

There's a place for such a narrow focus, it gets the job done. In the right place, at the right time it can be the right approach. It triggers our flight or fight response and the adrenaline this releases can become compulsive and addictive. Instead of reserving this approach for specific tasks and circumstances it becomes a habit and we shutdown to what's happening around us.

In this state our mind has narrowed to a single focus characterised by straight-line thinking and a black and white view of the world. We simply don't have time or space for anything else. We fail to notice what is happening right in front of us, especially the toxic impact this can have on ourselves and those around us.

## TOXIC IMPACT

When we believe things are not right we react immediately, frustrated at what we judge as lack of progress, competence or commitment by changing, correcting or berating as our mood or circumstances dictate. Rapid judgment and instant reactions are a hallmark of this level of busyness: only the problematic breaks through our focus and we ignore the rest, allowing our non-reaction to be sufficient expression. There's no time for praise and affirmation.

As a consequence the only communications are difficult ones and everyone is guarded around us increasing our sense of isolation. These exchanges confirm our worse suspicions, it's down to us, we can't trust anyone else and everyone wants us to think for them. We just might as well do it all ourselves. As we enter our mental bunker the pleasure seems to be evaporating from what we are doing. We are confused and feel on the brink. We can't work any harder and yet that's what the situation seems to demand.







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This is our fight or flight response at full throttle. To cope we switch onto automatic pilot driven by our habitual approaches and reactions and guided by our unquestioned assumptions. We are no longer open to the new, different or unexpected.

It's all the wrong way round: stepping back from the brink

Our instinct is to do more; instead we need to do less. Cutting across our instinct creates anxiety of its own and this is where Mindfulness can be so helpful. In spite of all the effort and energy we put in there is a laziness to this busyness. A laziness that fails to look beyond the task in hand to the wider context, to listen to what's going on, whether within us or outside.

There is an increased rigidity to our thought and behaviour and we experience greater difficulties relating to others and resolving our own emotional upsets. Making mistakes or getting something wrong really affects us and anything less than perfect feels a failure.

This is the moment we need to stop, however briefly.

**CHECKING IN**

Whenever we notice the pressure building the first thing we need to do is resist trying to fix it or blame others for how we feel. Instead we need to check in with a breathing space (see over). When we check in we give ourselves the opportunity to see what's actually going on. Often it's not what we thought. Our emotional balance is upset and there is a real sense of pushing and resisting.

When we acknowledge we are upset and turn softly towards the feeling, we move away from the fight or flight response towards rest and digest and the toxicity lessens. We are now beginning to listen again. As we listen we start to see the choices of response we have rather than a knee jerk reaction our instinct is demanding. As we recognise real choices without the feelings of blame, being wrong or stupid our anxiety lessens, we calm down and a sense of spaciousness, curiosity, creativity and innovation returns. We're now tuned in freeing us to bring all of our talents to the task in hand and a deeper connection with the people around us.

From this place we can move forward, without tripping over what's right in front of us.





## BREATHING SPACE

Softly smile (this is not about happiness but releasing tension in your face) and feel the space between your feet and the floor. Allow yourself to notice your breathing wherever it is clear to you without changing it.

**Ask yourself, what is the sensation in your mind right now?**

**Does this feel pleasant, unpleasant or neither of these?** (There's no wrong answer here).

Now scan through your body with your mind to see if there is any place you are holding tension, however gross or slight. Let your mind rest with the clearest of these and notice your mind's reaction (does it like this sensation, if not what is the reaction?). Softly smile anytime you notice tension building in your face or inside your head.

Whatever your reaction, gently hold this bodily sensation in your mind's awareness just like you would cuddle a sick child. (When a child comes to us upset, it's our instinct to cuddle them before we have any idea what might be wrong or even if we can make it better). Do this with the same gentleness we would hold a giant snowflake to avoid damaging it.

Stay with this for as many breaths as time allows. As you do this, you may find you become aware of much more than the task in hand, perhaps an unresolved issue that your busyness had disguised. This turning towards the difficult and uncomfortable is a key part of Mindfulness, holding softly moves us from aversion (which drives the urge to fix or run away) to acceptance.

With acceptance comes a lessening of our flight or fight response allowing our mind to become more spacious. With that comes the possibility of a freedom to see our choices of response where before we felt we could only react. When you have a little more time, try this extended breathing space. It lasts about 6 minutes and is available free to Yoga Magazine readers on my website.

Follow this link: <http://bit.ly/1gGK4wo>

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