

Session 2 Handout 6: The Breath

Breath is life. You could think of the breath as being like a thread or a chain that links and connects all the events of your life from birth, the beginning to death, the end. The breath is always there every moment, moving by itself like a river.

Have you ever noticed how the breath changes with our moods - short and shallow when we're tense or angry, faster when we're excited, slow and full when we are happy, and almost disappearing when we're afraid? It's there with us all the time. It can be used as a tool, like an anchor to bring stability to the body and the mind when we deliberately choose to become aware of it. We can tune into it at any moment during everyday life.

Mostly we're not in touch with our breathing- it's just there, forgotten. So one of the first things we do in mindfulness based stress reduction is to get in touch with it. We notice how the breath changes with our moods, our thoughts, our body movements. We don't have to control the breath. Just notice it and get to know it, like a friend. All that is necessary is to observe, watch, and feel the breath with a sense of interest, in a relaxed manner.

With practice, we become more aware of our breathing. We can use it to direct our awareness to different aspects of our lives. For example, to relax tense muscles, or focus on a situation that requires attention. Breath can also be used to help deal with pain, anger, relationships or the stress of daily life. During this program, we will be exploring this in greater detail.

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