

The Art of the Pause

Have you ever reacted to someone else's comments or actions with an immediate response only to regret your words moments later? It's very common to respond quickly and without much thought to a perceived slight, usually to everyone's detriment.

When we act fast, it usually is a response with a fully engaged ego which can be a protective device for us and an antagonistic response for others. It can give us a sense of action, correctness, and a sense of thinking we are righting a wrong or an injustice. So many times, though, a 'knee jerk' reaction is filled with unsubstantiated judgements, personal biases, and a need to feel we are making the world more perfect. It often simply placates our ego, the response is not well thought out, and it can offend or injure others.

"The world is imperfect and will remain that way. I cannot change this but will see it as an opportunity to awaken," says Deok Won, a Buddhist monk from the Zen Center in Grand Rapids.

One of the ways we can awaken to our connection with others is to utilize the pause. The pause can start a conscious action of surrendering (the ego) and allow the world and everyone in it to respond rather than react as well. It stops the 'fight or flight' mentality and lets the 'rest and relax' mode kick in, allowing us to be more genuine and heartfelt.

"The art of the pause" is a technique that can help us move through and change subconscious actions. It gives us time to look at the direction we are headed and decide if that is an action that would be beneficial for us. It can give us time to separate our action from the ever-present ego.

Subconscious actions are habits that we have learned to use. To change them takes a mindfulness and conscious thinking in the Now. By incorporating a pause before we respond, we disrupt our usual habits and open to new creative ways of behaving.

Several ideas to engage this technique include:

- ❖ **Use the breath** – Learn to take three 'letting go breaths' before speaking. The Magic Breath Tool Kit Self-Care Article can be very helpful in this.
- ❖ **Try paraphrasing** – "This technique helps us continue the flow and stay on the subject long enough for us to express a summary of all the information

we received.” It is more of an indirect pause. “Paraphrasing is simply saying back to the speaker what we thought they said.” ([Listening for Treasures in the Wind](#), page 78)

- ❖ **Create a moment of silence** – A slice of silence allows us to explore our mind, heart, feelings, pains, suffering, humor, and excitement, and respond without the usual outside influences. It also allows us space for empathy, to get a sense of what might be motivating the other person. It is truly one of the best inventions the Divine has to offer.
- ❖ **Take a step back** – To physically step out of the energetic circle of communication can offer a moment to regather your thoughts and find clarity for your response.

So as not to be misunderstood by the person to whom you are talking, it may also help to say, “Just a minute, I’m practicing ‘the art of the pause’ so I am clear.”

Many books have been written on the subject and several are worth mentioning here:

[Change Your Thoughts – Change Your Life](#) by Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

“Surrendering is a mental process: It involves taking a split second to stop yourself, to step back and be a witness rather than a protagonist.”

[Radical Acceptance](#) by Tara Brach PhD

“But by disrupting our habitual behaviors, we open to the possibility of new and creative ways of responding to our wants and fear.” (page 52)

“Through the sacred art of pausing, we develop the capacity to stop hiding, to stop running away from our experience.” (page 53)

Whether you take a physical step back, mentally use the breath, or close your eyes and tune out the world, using “the art of the pause” can help us connect more deeply with others and stay even tempered and relaxed in this wonderful experience of life.

