



Photo via blogging.godaddy.com

Seeking Re:pose: Recharge Through Stillness

~Amy Cushing

As a yoga teacher, I open all of my classes with a few minutes of stillness. I ask that my students sit and take the time to connect with the space around them, to notice the tangible: the floor beneath them, the sensation of the air brushing their skin, the sound of their own breath. The intent is to take their attention away from the constant chit chat filling their minds and pause to make room for their practice.

I ask that they sit and breathe. It's that simple, and that complicated.

In cultures that glorify busyness as a means to success, to ask people to sit and essentially do what is perceived as little in return, it can be a tough sell. In actuality, it is the stillness, the doing nothing, this is essential to continuing to produce effectively. For artists and writers in particular, the need to recharge is essential to their creative ability. They need to make room for their art.

Artists and writers spend much of their working hours pulling from a deep well of creative inspiration---the lifeblood of their livelihood. When the inspiration runs dry, their work suffers. This is when stillness becomes vital. Artistic blocks often originate from failing to give the mind a rest and dedicating time to reset the mind/body connection. Taking time to sit and settle the proverbial hamster on the wheel not only refreshes the body, but it can unblock the creative stream so it can once again fill up the well.

When my clients express interest in starting a meditation practice, I often refer them to the basics of “zazen,” a meditation practice from Zen Buddhism. Zazen means “sitting meditation,” a practice intended to bring the mind, body, and breath back into harmony. The central focus of zazen is the breath. It is the tool used to return the body and mind to equilibrium.

Roshi Shunryu Suzuki, author of *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, noted the importance of shikan taza, or just sitting. He says, “when we practice zazen, we just practice it. Just sit and connect with the breath.” Through meditation, we are trying to dissolve the self for a moment. To connect with the deeper part of ourselves that gets buried in the busyness. Suzuki explains, “what we call ‘I’ is just a swinging door which moves when we inhale and when we exhale.”

I recommend beginners start with a ten-minute meditation. If one can tolerate a longer time, even better, but I find ten minutes should be the minimum since it can take a while to new practitioners to get settled.

1. To begin, find a comfortable place to sit---on the floor or in a chair. Feel free to support the back against the wall if need be.
2. Bring what you need to be comfortable: a cushion to sit on, a blanket, a timer. This is the one time I recommend no music. Only recline if it’s necessary, as ten minutes of quiet for busy minds often leads to sleep.
3. Sit tall. Think of a string lifting and lengthening the spine as it reaches up to the ceiling. Arms are relaxed, draped at the sides. Hands can be placed in cosmic mudra with the dominant hand supporting the other. Touch the thumbs together, creating an oval-round shape. Rest the hands gently on your lap.
4. Focus on the breath. The inhales, the exhales. Note their movement. Notice how the body moves with their presence. The expansion of the chest as it rises with the inhale. The compression of the ribs as the diaphragm presses the air out. Movement in, movement out. When you find the mind wandering, as it is inclined to do, return to the breath. The movement in, the movement out. The breath is the tether that keeps you grounded in the moment, in the stillness.

5. Sit until timer beeps.

As I said before, it's that easy and that complicated. It can be a challenge trying to reign in the mind, but with practice it becomes easier, and with practice you'll realize the benefits meditation can have on maintaining a healthy supply of creativity. Even the hamster on the wheel needs to rest from time to time.

The next time you find your inspiration lagging, heed the words of Roshi Suzuki, "just sit." There is magic in the stillness.

Sudinamastu! (May your day be good)

Published on Be You Media Group, February 2015