



SIX ASPECTS OF A SILENT PAUSE

Suggestions for Inner Peace in Difficult Times

Also known as “Brahms”

By Cynthia Overweg

Introduction: Taking a silent pause from the noise and disruptions of everyday life can bring perspective to the challenges we face, individually and collectively. Connecting to this inner awareness or presence can help restore our resilience, renew our energy and reclaim our equilibrium. Then we can look at *what is* without being overwhelmed by it. We can act from a place in our hearts that is compassionate and wise, despite outer circumstances.

A silent pause can be long or short. It can be frequent or occasional. In my own experience, I’ve found that setting aside a few minutes in the morning, afternoon and evening works well. But there is no “formula” for taking a silent pause, other than remembering to do so. If you forget, it’s okay. It happens to everyone. Once you remember to give yourself a silent pause, the forgetting eventually passes away, and inner quietude simply arises naturally.

The following six aspects of a Silent Pause are suggestions that have been helpful at retreats I facilitate, and in my own life. I’ve given these suggestions the acronym, “Brahms,” as a way of remembering the sequence. This acronym appeared to me as a kind of map while I was putting together a simple way of inviting inner quietude. Johannes Brahms was of course a great classical music composer, who also wrote a famous lullaby that many of us heard as children. But the song is not important in the context of a silent pause, though sometimes music can have that effect. A silent pause is about slowing things down when we feel stressed, so that we can live in a deeper, more grounded awareness.

Please note: These six suggestions are not medical advice. They are simple approaches to quieting the mind and relaxing the body. Choose a quiet and safe place where you can relax and be at ease.



Cynthia's Six Aspects of a Silent Pause

"Brahms"

1. *Breath.* Breathing with awareness helps us slow down and center ourselves in the body, rather than in the head. It places our attention on our own breath, something we are rarely aware of because it happens automatically. Begin by gently and naturally taking a breath, inhale and exhale, placing your attention on the natural rhythm of your breath. Notice the expansion and contraction of your lungs. With inner awareness, gently inhale and exhale five complete breaths. Take your time. No rush. Notice the inner quietude that begins to appear.

2. *Relaxation.* After taking a few conscious breaths, bring your attention to the entire body, particularly where there is tension. Most often, we accumulate tension in the jaws, back of the head, neck, throat, shoulders, stomach or back, and sometimes in several or all of those areas simultaneously. Just noticing where we feel body tension is the first step to relief.

One way of approaching this is to close your eyes, breathe consciously, and do a "body scan." I like to begin with sensing my feet on the floor and slowly work my way up to my shoulders, face and head, stopping along the way in places where I notice tension or tightness, and breathing into those places with attention, letting muscles relax naturally.

If you prefer to begin with relaxing the body from the head down, that's okay too. You can start with the top and back of the head, then move to the face and jaws, neck and shoulders, and so on. Many of us hold a lot of tension in our shoulders, as if we're carrying the weight of the world there. Take it slow and breathe with awareness as you unwind the body's tension wherever you notice it. When your body scan and relaxation of tension is complete, take a moment to appreciate all the good that is in your life. Relaxation and gratitude have a beneficial effect on our well-being.

3. *Attention.* Breath awareness and body relaxation help us gather our attention inward. Without inner attention, the mind is on auto-pilot and driven by our conditioning; it's not awake; it's reactive and stress builds up in the body. In addition to observing our breath and bringing attention to body relaxation, we can gather our attention by taking a moment to consider the many ways we lose our attention in worry, fear and habitual patterns that scatter our attention and waste precious energy.

Attention is fundamental to a silent pause. Attention clears the mind of useless chatter by interrupting the constant momentum of thought. Two simple ways to gather our attention have already been suggested, and here are two more: Conscious listening and seeing. This sounds so simple, but how often do we take a moment to actually listen to the ordinary sounds of life? The buzzing of a bee; the sound of water as it rushes out of a faucet; the innocent laughter of a child. Listening with our full attention effortlessly brings us into a silent pause.

The same is true when we look at anything that enters our field of vision. Our first tendency is to *name* what we see. Once we name something or someone, there are a set of assumptions and opinions that are part of it. We can't help it. But what if we can let go of naming for a moment? It's not easy because we are creatures of language, yet not-naming can be effortless if we can fully relax with the help of conscious breathing and attentive listening and seeing. Then it's possible to glance at a tree or a sunset, and for a second or two, not name it. It just *is*. This dimension of attention is a truly silent pause within the absolute stillness of unity.



4. Heart. A silent pause honors the truth in our hearts. In everyday life, we are mostly governed by what the mind is thinking or the task it is working on. We often ignore or we're not aware of an inner urging of conscience that bypasses the conditioned mind and comes directly from the heart. It silently prompts us to be authentic, kind and caring. The heart naturally embraces what unites us, not the illusion of what separates us.

A silent pause gives us access to the great reservoir of wisdom and compassion at the center of our being, and it helps to understand ourselves and others. Connecting to the truth in our own hearts is enhanced by the three previous suggestions of conscious breathing, body relaxation, and the sustained attention of seeing and listening. Listen to your heart in the stillness of a silent pause.

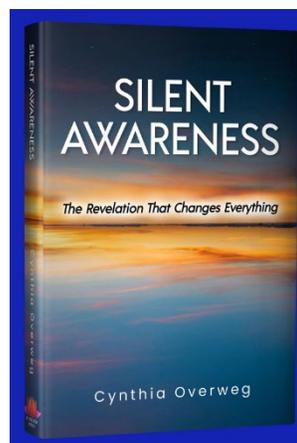
5. **Meditative** walking and gentle movement. It's important to put down our digital devices and go outside (weather permitting) for a quiet walk. Nature-walks or beach-walking is soothing to body, mind and spirit. So are gardening, yoga, dancing, bicycling, tennis or any physical activity that gives you joy. Our bodies need daily exercise to relieve stress and help us sleep better; nothing intense, just some simple stretches and gentle motion help enormously. If meditative walking or other physical activities are not possible, then do what is possible to strengthen muscles and circulation under a doctor's guidance. Just opening a window and breathing-in fresh air can help ground us in stillness.

6. **Serenity** of speech and action. The word "serenity" is derived from the Latin "serenus," which means "clear" or "calm." Silent pauses light the way to a calm and balanced way of living, despite outer circumstances. Central to this way of being is how we use our voice and how we interact with others and the world. When our attention is quietly gathered inward, we can speak truth to power without being strident or angry. We can speak up for ourselves and for those who can't speak for themselves. We can do this in a calm and clear manner that is direct, but does not seek to insult.

A daily practice of silent pauses can help us engage in compassionate action in the world that makes a lasting difference, largely because the energy which propels us to action is underpinned with compassion, rather than anger.

May these six aspects of a silent pause add meaning and happiness to your day.

*With Loving Wishes,
Cynthia*



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