

the brief *embodied* *cognition* *exercise*



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When I get to heaven they will not ask me, "Why were you not Moses?" instead they will ask "Why were you not Susya? Why did you not become what only you could become?"

Susya, a Hasidic rabbi

*Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile,
but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy. Thich Nhat Hanh*

introduction - Companion handouts give details of the research that underpins approaches used in this brief "*breathing space*" exercise. These include the linked "*The brief embodied cognition exercise: background information*" as well as "*Our minds work associatively*", the "*Embodied cognition*" series, "*To reach the other shore with each step of the crossing*", "*Therapeutic writing & speaking: inspiration from values*" and "*Implementation intentions*". It would be sensible to have some understanding of this work before using the "*Brief embodied cognition exercise*". It's likely to make this short meditation much more useful if you have a sense of what you're trying to do, why, and how very likely it is that the sequence can be surprisingly powerful.

twelve breath exercise – The exercise is made up of three stages, each of four breaths. Usually go through the sequence when sitting (although you can try standing, walking & lying down as well). Start with the body positioned open & tall. **1.) mindful "undoing"**: The first stage is a body scan. It's coming to a "*being*" state after all the "*doing*" we have probably been involved with. Gently observe "*How am I? What's going on inside me? Where am I holding tension?*" Not actively trying to change anything. Just being aware in the here & now. Realising that I don't have to hold on to anything. I don't have to "*do*" all this busyness, this tightening, this thinking, this rushing. I can just "*be*", let go, uncrumple. It may well be helpful to do this while taking four somewhat slower, fuller breaths. See what depth of breath suits you. If you're "*in public*", the breaths can just slow and deepen slightly so that the exercise is largely unnoticeable to others. It will probably help to move your attention through your body in a regular, familiar way. See what works well for you. One option is to notice any residual tension as you breathe in and – acknowledging that you don't have to keep actively holding or tightening – let go and let free with the outbreath. Try focusing on the four limbs with your first in and out breath. Then the trunk. Then the neck, head, face & eyes. The fourth breath can be for the whole body & mind. Releasing. Cleansing. Freeing. Just being here & now. And if the letting go, the undoing doesn't come easily – like a blessing – this is OK too. Imagine it happening. Slowly our bodies, our nervous systems can learn to follow the lead of the mind. **2.) embodied values**: Become aware of the personal values that you now re-link to. In this next four breath sequence, allocate breaths to the different values that you're nourishing & being guided by in your life. They are the "*compass bearing*". For example, I currently work with three values, three qualities – courage, compassion & curiosity. Each value is really best described using a cluster of words. So courage, for me here, also involves authenticity, truth & autonomy. Compassion is the central value and links in with love, connection & kindness. Curiosity involves seeing clearly, **[Cont.]**

questioning, & exploring as well. I sometimes describe the qualities almost as "*characters*" – Warrior, Healer & Explorer. And I locate them respectively in my belly ("*fire in the belly*"!), my heart and my head. So for me, I use a breath for each "*quality cluster*". I silently name each quality, each character and allow/encourage a sense of strength, opening & connecting. I consciously allow my body, my face to adjust a little, to take up a posture and expression that incorporates the quality that I'm linking to. The fourth breath of the sequence for me is almost like a "*chord*", an acknowledgment that the "*compass bearing*" is for all three of these qualities to work together synergistically. See what mix of qualities is truest and most important for you. Be creative. They may evolve and change over the months and years. This is fine. It can be so helpful to regularly link to the values that matter most to us. **3.) action visualization:** Now take a final four breaths while you imagine yourself living your values in the next few hours (or days). Who will you be interacting with and how do you want to be with them? What are some of the challenges you might face – externally & internally? How do you want to respond? See yourself doing this, embodying the qualities, welcoming how they can express through you in how you live your life. Feel it in your body, your posture & your face. Linking physically in this way activates a cascade of associations including fine tuning our feelings, shifting our biochemistry and altering our action tendencies. Others experience us differently too. We know from the many research studies on "*embodied cognition*" and "*implementation intentions*" that this kind of self-preparation can be very helpful. As Gandhi said "*Be the change you want to see in the world*". Remember the Native American Indian story – "*One evening an old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside people. He said "My son, the battle is between two wolves inside us all. One is Evil. It is anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is Good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf wins?" The old Cherokee simply replied, "The one you feed."*" So this "*embodied values*" exercise nourishes the qualities that are most important to us, the values we would be happy to have written on our gravestones. Experiment with using this brief practice at least three times per day. And be creative; feel free to alter it in any ways that suit you.

shorter & longer exercises - In addition to these twelve breath meditations, by all means experiment with shorter & longer practices. A two to four breath exercise often works well. I typically practice this in a way that means any observers wouldn't be aware that I'm doing a brief centering exercise – except maybe they might become aware that I've become a bit more nourishing and real to be around! Again I would link to coming into the present, to embodied cognition, to values. I might choose particular situations or activities to act as reminders to use one of these short re-centering exercises. Examples include when checking the time, using a phone, walking, eating, brushing one's teeth, when stopped at a traffic lights, when waiting for anything. Often these short practices will be done when standing with eyes open, although sitting is great too. You can experiment with reminder dots, or little pieces of blu-tack stuck around your environment. They can be used to trigger a short two to four breath exercise – quite probably not needing to stop what you're doing, but simply incorporating the brief practice as you continue with your day. And of course this work can be linked in a variety of creative ways into longer, formal meditation sessions as well. This opportunity to go inwards more deeply over more prolonged periods can be very helpful in making the twelve-breath and briefer practices richer & more useful as well. Be creative. Explore what particularly helps you link to your core values, and allows them to express more fully in your body, in your face, in your movement and in how you live your life.
