

10% Slower

Mind/Body Connection – Why moving more slowly matters.

Long distance runners know that, when possible, breathing through the nose is preferred to breathing through the mouth. When we breathe through our nose, which is the body's natural way of breathing, the message to the mind is that all systems are normal, all is well. When we breathe through our mouth, the message to the mind is that more oxygen is needed and therefore, there may be a problem. When breathing through the nose, the mind is calmer, which means the body isn't ramping up to deal with a potential problem. The calmer body uses less oxygen and the runner can run longer and faster with greater ease.

When we feel that we have a lot to do, and we're not mindful of that feeling, the energy in the mind starts to get frenetic. The body responds, as it must, to this energy, and begins to move more quickly. This, in turn, feeds back the message to the mind that things are not OK as a body moving quickly usually means something is amiss. The mind becomes more frantic, which causes the body to move faster, etc. Fortunately, with mindfulness, we can break this cycle.

If we can be aware and move just a bit more slowly than the mind may be telling us to, the feedback to the mind is that things in our world at the moment are calm and OK. This helps to calm the frenetic energy in the mind and reduce the impulse to move quickly to get things done. The effect on the body is that it calms and slows to a more normal pace. In addition, the nervous system calms and regulates, and we begin inhabiting a world where the felt sense in both the body and mind is that all is well at the moment.

Whatever We Do, We're Getting Better At

As we begin to be mindful of the body and consciously move just a bit slower, we begin to create a habit in the body and mind. As with all other things, the more we do something, the more habitual it becomes. Mindfulness begets mindfulness and the time we spend not being aware of our bodies and rushing forward into life decreases. Slowly, the baseline experience becomes one of body awareness and not moving more quickly than necessary. Still, we can get caught in old patterns. The mind becomes frenetic, feels like there's not enough time to get things done, and we start to rush. The difference now though is that the rushing is quickly felt, as it is incongruous with the new baseline of calm. We're quicker to notice the rushing, thereby decreasing the amount of time we are deepening that habit. With mindfulness, we can create the conditions that are supportive of calm in the moment and in the future, and weaken the conditions that are supportive of rushing in the moment and in the future. It's really that simple. We just need to begin with the intention to notice and keep doing the best we can.

Bringing patience and perseverance to the times when we lose touch and begin to rush. The Dharma will take care of the rest!

Observing yourself as you move about

One way to practice being mindful of your movements and keep from rushing is to have a sense that the part of you that is aware is watching you do whatever you are doing. The sense one gets when doing this is bringing more attention to the watcher and less to actually what is being done. It's not that there won't be enough attention to perform whatever you are doing adequately, but you won't be lost in the content. There's more energy that is occupying the knowing aspect of what is going on. Sometimes in formal meditation practice, this is called awareness of awareness. The key is to not get too caught up and tight around whether you're being aware of awareness or not. That can be a slippery slope to confusion and doubt. Instead, just imagine that you are watching yourself do what you're doing. You can even pretend that it is your wise and kind self that is doing the watching. It's really just taking a bit of the attention off what you're doing and putting it on that you are doing it. Once you get the hang of it, you can slip into this more observing mode, and into 10% slower, at any time and with anything that you are doing.

Connecting with A Sense of Care For All Things

When we are lost in our thoughts we tend to move in a way that, when people become aware of it, describe it as toppling forward. This is due to the mind being lost in the future, thinking about all we need to get done and the body responding to that state by literally leaning forward and moving more quickly than needed. When we are in this state, we tend to bang up against things, knock things over, and drop things. We're literally not being careful. The word careful can be broken down to, being full of care. When we're rushing through life and not being careful, we are interacting with the world with a lack of care.

Moving just 10% more slowly is enough to interrupt the habit of toppling forward thought life. We begin to move more carefully. Picking something up or putting it down, opening or shutting a drawer or cabinet is done carefully. We can actually begin to feel the care in our heart as we move in this way. There's a subtle tenderness towards all things that can arise when we can be mindful and consciously move a bit more slowly. This feels good and encourages us to want to inhabit this mind state more and more. Which, in turn, supports the remembering of it more frequently.

As we tap into our innate care for the well-being of all things, just doing a simply thing like opening a book can be exquisite. It's how we turn the mundane into the sacred. What makes something sacred isn't the thing itself, it's the energy behind it. When the energy is one that is mindful and full of care, whatever we find ourselves engaged in is sacred. Even amidst

challenging situations, there can be a sense of caring for everyone and everything involved. Moving 10% slower allows this potential to come to fruition.

Practice

Pick something you do just about every day, like making a hot drink in the morning or cleaning up after dinner. Pick something that doesn't take more than 5 or 10 minutes. If the activity is too long, it will be difficult to maintain the intention to practice with that activity. Make it your intention to move 10% slower as you do that activity. Notice the pull to move more quickly and get it done. When you notice that pull, consciously move just a bit slower. At some point, you'll forget and start moving more quickly. The habit is strong, but you'll notice it again and can consciously slow down a bit. Over time, the time spent moving more quickly than need be will decrease, and the time spent moving at a pace that isn't frenetic and more careful will increase. As you continue to practice with the particular activity you've chosen, moving more slowly while doing that activity will become habitual. This will have an effect on all your other activities, as now you know what not rushing feels like. When you start to rush doing other activities, you'll be more likely to become aware of that. You can also pick another activity to consciously practice with as you did the first one. I can't stress enough how much this practice is supportive of being mindful of any moment during the day.